

# The MySpace Story

Atilla Boz

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# The Band Milestones

## The Numbers That Changed Music

On a platform built for connection, the real revolution was measured in digits. Not follower counts or play statistics—those metrics would come to define social media success for decades. But in the early days of MySpace, every milestone represented something more fundamental: proof that the music industry had fundamentally changed.

Before MySpace, the path from garage band to record deal was brutally simple: play shows, pray for press, hope a scout wandered into the right club on the right night. Artists could spend years grinding through the club circuit, burning through savings, waiting for that one lucky break that statistically would never come.

MySpace obliterated that system in real-time. Suddenly, a teenager in Sheffield could reach more listeners in a single afternoon than most bands reached in a decade of touring. A Malibu songwriter recording in her bathroom could bypass every gatekeeper in the industry. A seventeen-year-old in Miami could spam his way to a record deal without ever setting foot in a label office.

The platform didn't just democratize distribution—it created an entirely new metric for measuring artist potential. Play counts, friend numbers, profile visits: these weren't vanity metrics. They were the new currency of the music industry, and the artists who figured that out first changed everything.

## The First Followers: Building the Foundation

The earliest MySpace music pages launched in late 2003 and early 2004, shortly after the platform itself went live in August 2003. For bands discovering the platform in those frontier months, the metrics were comically modest by later standards. Getting ten friends felt like an achievement. Reaching a hundred seemed impossible.

The first bands to crack the follower codes weren't always the most talented—they were simply the most persistent. Houston rapper Chamillionaire understood this instinctively. While still hustling mixtapes through local channels, he began building his MySpace presence in early 2004, relentlessly engaging with fans, posting new content, and treating the platform not as a promotional afterthought but as his primary connection to listeners.

By May 2004, Chamillionaire had achieved what seemed impossible: over 100,000 friends on a platform barely nine months old. The significance wasn't just the number—it was what the number represented. Here was an independent artist, unsigned by any major label, with a following that rivaled established acts. The mixtape legend who would later become known for "Ridin'" had discovered something the entire music industry was still sleeping on: direct artist-to-fan connection at unprecedented scale.

The early adopter advantage was real but fleeting. Within months, the platform would explode with musicians of every genre. But those first movers—the artists who understood that MySpace wasn't just MySpace, but a fundamental shift in how music would be discovered—had already staked their claims.

## The Million Play Milestone

If the follower count proved an artist could build an audience, the play count proved something more valuable: that the music itself had legs. A friend could be acquired through aggressive adding or clever profile design. A play required someone to actually press that button and listen.

The race to one million plays became the first great achievement marker in MySpace music history. Artists and labels alike watched the counters tick upward, understanding that this metric—raw, unfiltered audience engagement—represented a new form of industry validation.

The Arctic Monkeys reached the milestone first, in circumstances that perfectly encapsulated MySpace's chaotic energy. The Sheffield band hadn't even created their own profile—fans had done it for them, uploading bootleg recordings from shows and demos burned to CDs at gigs. By August 2005, those fan-uploaded tracks had accumulated over one million plays, transforming the band from a local phenomenon into an international sensation before they'd released a single official recording.

The irony wasn't lost on the industry: a band that famously claimed ignorance of how to upload music to the internet had become the most successful internet-discovered act in history. As guitarist Jamie Cook told reporters, the band had simply handed out CDs at shows and "let their fans do the rest." Those fans had built something no marketing department could have manufactured: organic, viral demand that made the Arctic Monkeys the most talked-about unsigned band in the world.

When "I Bet You Look Good on the Dancefloor" debuted at number one on the UK Singles Chart in October 2005—selling 38,922 copies on release day alone—it wasn't just a hit single. It was proof that MySpace plays could translate directly into real-world sales, that the digital hype machine and the traditional music industry had finally converged.

## The Rise of Colbie Caillat

If the Arctic Monkeys represented the chaotic, fan-driven side of MySpace discovery, Colbie Caillat represented something equally important: the platform's power to launch completely unknown artists on the strength of a single song.

Caillat was a textbook MySpace success story. The daughter of Grammy-winning producer Ken Caillat (who had engineered Fleetwood Mac's legendary "Rumours" album), she had grown up around music but struggled to find her own footing in the industry. In late 2005, friends convinced her to create a MySpace page, uploading demos she'd recorded in her bathroom—chosen for its reverb-friendly acoustics.

The songs sat largely unnoticed until one track began gaining traction: a breezy, hook-laden number called "Bubbly." Word of mouth spread. Plays accumulated. Within months, Caillat's MySpace page was pulling thousands of hits daily. Rolling Stone highlighted her as one of the top female artists on the networking site after she'd accumulated just 6,240 friends—proof that the industry was watching these metrics closely.

For four consecutive months, Caillat held the position of MySpace's number one unsigned artist, garnering over 14 million plays in the process. Labels began circling. When Universal Republic finally signed her – as her friend count surpassed 100,000 – they were essentially ratifying a success that had already happened organically.

“Bubbly” would reach number five on the Billboard Hot 100 and spend over a year on the charts. But the song’s commercial success was almost beside the point. Caillat had proven something more fundamental: that a completely unknown artist, with no industry connections beyond a famous father, could build a career entirely through MySpace momentum. The platform hadn’t just discovered her—it had made her discovery inevitable.

## The British Invasion 2.0

While MySpace was an American creation, some of its most dramatic success stories emerged from the United Kingdom, where a new generation of artists used the platform to bypass the traditionally gatekept British music press.

Lily Allen’s story began in frustration. Signed to Regal Records in 2005 with a modest £25,000 budget, she found the label too preoccupied with bigger releases—Coldplay’s “X&Y,” Gorillaz’s “Demon Days,” to provide meaningful support. Rather than wait for attention that might never come, Allen took advice from fellow UK artist Lady Sovereign and created a MySpace page in November 2005, uploading demos and two self-compiled mixtapes.

The demos attracted thousands of listeners. A limited edition 7-inch vinyl of “LDN” was rush-released and resold for as much as £40. By March 2006, Allen had accumulated tens of thousands of MySpace friends and caught the attention of *The Observer Music Monthly*. Her debut single “Smile” hit number one on the UK Singles Chart in July 2006, and suddenly labels everywhere were scrambling to understand what had just happened.

Allen’s success was particularly significant because it challenged the traditional British music industry structure. The UK had long relied on music press—*NME*, *Melody Maker*, the broadsheet music sections—to anoint new artists. MySpace rendered that gatekeeping function largely obsolete. An artist could now build a following that made press coverage inevitable rather than hoping press coverage would somehow generate a following.

Kate Nash followed a similar path in 2007, using MySpace to promote demos that would become her debut album “Made of Bricks.” The platform’s British success stories multiplied: Enter Shikari built their fanbase through aggressive MySpace engagement, eventually selling out the London Astoria without radio support or label backing. The rules had changed, and the UK’s new artists understood that better than anyone.

## The American Underground

Across the Atlantic, MySpace was transforming American music scenes that had traditionally operated far from major label attention. The platform's impact on emo, metalcore, and post-hardcore genres was particularly dramatic—these scenes had always thrived on DIY distribution and fan networking, making them natural fits for MySpace's architecture.

Panic! at the Disco's origin story read like a MySpace fever dream. The Las Vegas band had formed in 2004 as a Blink-182 cover band before writing original material. They'd never played a live show when guitarist Ryan Ross, then eighteen and in college, began his internet campaign.

Ross posted the band's demos everywhere – PureVolume, LiveJournal, MySpace, YouTube, anywhere with a comment section or message system. His persistence bordered on spam. Eventually, he targeted Pete Wentz, the Fall Out Boy bassist who had developed a reputation for discovering new talent through online channels.

Wentz would later tell Nylon magazine about the “ongoing LiveJournal skirmish” that preceded the discovery: “They would send me nasty messages and mess with me, and I'd mess with them back... One day they told me to listen to their band—which of course I did because I wanted to tell them how shitty they were—and was blown away.”

By late 2004, Wentz had driven from Los Angeles to Las Vegas to meet the band. He signed them to his newly formed Decaydance Records without them ever having performed live. When they played for him that first time, it was an acoustic set in a practice space—they didn't know how to play their own demos as a full band yet. Their debut album, “A Fever You Can't Sweat Out,” released in September 2005, would sell over two million copies in the United States and win Video of the Year at the MTV Video Music Awards.

The Panic! at the Disco story became a template: talented teenagers discover MySpace, build buzz through relentless online engagement, catch the attention of an established artist or A&R scout monitoring the platform, sign deal, achieve success. The formula seemed almost reproducible.

## Sean Kingston and the Hip-Hop Revolution

MySpace's music revolution wasn't limited to rock and pop. Hip-hop artists discovered the platform could bypass the traditional mixtape-to-label pipeline that had dominated rap for decades.

Sean Kingston's story began in the kind of circumstances that typically end music careers before they start. Born Kisean Anderson in Miami to a Jamaican family, Kingston had spent his childhood bouncing between Florida and Jamaica. His mother had been sent to prison when he was fifteen. He was barely surviving, borrowing friends' computers to access the internet.

Using MySpace, Kingston began a campaign of targeted outreach that would have been impossible in any earlier era. He found producer J.R. Rotem's page and began messaging him relentlessly—copying, pasting, sending the same pitch repeatedly until Rotem finally responded.

"I remember it like it was yesterday," Kingston later told *Grammy.com*. "Me copying and pasting the message and just kept sending it. I'll never forget the day when I got the message. He said, 'I'm in L.A., you're in L.A. Let's have a meeting. You need to meet me here now.'"

Kingston caught two city buses from Burbank to Culver City for that meeting. By the end of the conversation, he had a deal with Rotem's Beluga Heights label. "Beautiful Girls," released in May 2007, became one of the fastest-climbing songs in Billboard chart history, reaching number one and staying there for weeks.

The song made Kingston the first artist born in the 1990s to score a number one hit on the Billboard Hot 100. He was seventeen years old, discovered through nothing more than persistence and MySpace access.

## The Ten Million Mark

As play counts climbed into the millions, a new benchmark emerged: ten million plays. Reaching this number required not just initial buzz but sustained engagement—proof that an artist could maintain audience attention over time.

Colbie Caillat's "Bubbly" crossed into ten million play territory in 2007, but the milestone became increasingly common as the platform's userbase

expanded. The significance shifted: ten million plays no longer guaranteed anything. It simply got you noticed.

By 2008, the metrics arms race had escalated beyond individual comprehension. Major label artists began dominating play counts not through organic discovery but through promotional muscle. The democratizing promise of MySpace's early days began to erode as money and marketing resources reasserted their traditional advantages.

The transformation was visible in the platform's official charts. In the early days, unsigned artists regularly appeared alongside established acts. By 2007, the top spots increasingly belonged to artists with label backing and promotional budgets. MySpace hadn't eliminated the advantages of industry support—it had simply created new battlefields where those advantages could be deployed.

## **Calvin Harris: The DJ Who Broke Through**

MySpace's impact extended beyond traditional band structures to electronic music, where DJs had long struggled for mainstream recognition. Calvin Harris used the platform to bridge the gap between underground dance music and pop success.

The Scottish producer had been releasing tracks independently when MySpace's music features launched. He began uploading his productions, building a following among electronic music fans who discovered his work through the platform's related artist algorithms and user recommendations.

Harris's MySpace success caught the attention of EMI, leading to his signing with Sony BMG in 2006. His debut album "I Created Disco," released in 2007, drew directly from the playful, accessible electronic style he'd developed while gauging audience reaction on MySpace. The title track and subsequent singles performed well, but more importantly, Harris had established a direct connection to fans that would serve him throughout his career.

The pattern would repeat across electronic music: Skrillex would later use MySpace-era connections to build his own empire, discovering artists like Zedd through the platform's messaging system. "Hey, 99.9% of the EDM scene sucks, you're the last bit that does not, you're awesome and you'll like my music," Zedd wrote to Skrillex in 2011—and found himself signed to OWSLA shortly after.

## From First to Last: The Skrillex Origin Story

Before he became one of electronic music's biggest names, Sonny Moore was the teenage frontman of From First to Last, a post-hardcore band that epitomized MySpace's music scene. The band's story illustrated both the platform's power and its limits.

From First to Last had formed in Los Angeles in 1999 but found their breakthrough through MySpace in the mid-2000s. Moore himself was recruited through the platform—guitarist Matt Good discovered him online and reached out, leading to Moore joining as vocalist.

The band's MySpace presence helped drive sales of their 2004 debut "Dear Diary, My Teen Angst Has a Body Count." Songs like "Note to Self" became profile staples across the platform, their auto-play features introducing the band to millions of potential fans. The band toured extensively, building on their online following to fill venues across America.

But Moore left the band in 2007 to pursue solo projects, eventually developing the sound that would make him famous as Skrillex. His transition from screamo vocalist to dubstep pioneer demonstrated how MySpace-era connections could extend far beyond the platform itself. When Skrillex began building his own label, OWSLA, he used the same networking approach that had discovered him—finding artists online and offering them opportunities based on talent rather than industry connections.

## The Breakthrough Artists Hall of Fame

By the time MySpace's music features reached their peak influence around 2007-2008, the platform had launched dozens of significant careers. A partial accounting of artists who found their breakthrough through MySpace reads like a cross-section of mid-2000s popular music:

**Arctic Monkeys** - Fans created their MySpace page; the band's demos accumulated millions of plays before any official release. Their debut album became the fastest-selling debut in UK chart history.

**Lily Allen** - Used MySpace to circumvent her label's lack of support, building a following that made "Smile" an inevitable hit.



**Colbie Caillat** - Four months as MySpace's number one unsigned artist led to a record deal and mainstream success with "Bubbly."

**Kate Nash** - Built her fanbase entirely through MySpace before releasing "Made of Bricks."

**Panic! at the Disco** - Signed by Pete Wentz based entirely on MySpace demos, without ever having performed live.

**Sean Kingston** - Spammed his way to a record deal, using MySpace messages to reach producer J.R. Rotem.

**Calvin Harris** - Used MySpace to transition from bedroom producer to mainstream electronic artist.

**Enter Shikari** - Sold out venues without radio support or label backing, building their following entirely through online engagement.

**Owl City** - Adam Young uploaded demos from his parents' basement, eventually securing a Republic Records deal that led to the six-times platinum "Fireflies."

**Hollywood Undead** - Built their following through aggressive MySpace engagement, combining hip-hop and rock in ways that resonated with the platform's young userbase.

**Black Veil Brides** - Andy Biersack, then known as "Andy Six," built a cult following that led to their debut album selling 10,000 copies in its first week.

**Bring Me the Horizon** - Became the most popular band on MySpace in 2010, using the platform's final years of relevance to cement their position in metalcore.

**From First to Last** - Launched the career of Sonny Moore, who would later become Skrillex.

**Adele** - Though less directly associated with MySpace discovery, she later acknowledged the platform's role in her early career, saying she owed her breakthrough to a friend who put her music on MySpace in late 2004.

## The Labels Respond

The major labels' response to MySpace's music revolution evolved through several distinct phases. Initially, most labels ignored the platform entirely—

social networking seemed like a passing fad, irrelevant to the serious business of artist development and music sales.

That changed rapidly as the success stories accumulated. By 2006, every major label had assigned staff to monitor MySpace for emerging talent. A&R departments developed new metrics: play counts, friend growth rates, comment engagement. The traditional A&R skillset—an ear for talent, industry connections, a nose for trends—suddenly required technological fluency as well.

Some labels embraced the change enthusiastically. Fueled by Ramen, already positioned as an alternative to major label structures, leveraged MySpace discoveries to build its roster. Pete Wentz's Decaydance Records existed specifically to capitalize on online discoveries. Interscope began monitoring the platform for electronic music talent, eventually signing Zedd and other producers discovered through online channels.

Other labels struggled to adapt. The same executives who had dismissed Napster as a fad were reluctant to accept that a social networking site could identify talent better than their decades of industry experience. They watched Arctic Monkeys' astronomical sales with a mixture of admiration and resentment, understanding that the discovery had happened entirely outside their systems.

The tension would define music industry strategy for years: how to incorporate online metrics into traditional A&R processes without abandoning the human judgment that had historically identified stars.

## The Fan Connection Revolution

Beyond the cold metrics of play counts and follower numbers, MySpace fundamentally transformed the relationship between artists and audiences. For the first time, fans could communicate directly with musicians, leave comments on their pages, send messages through the platform's system.

The immediacy was unprecedented. A fan in Tokyo could comment on an unsigned band's page in Sheffield and receive a response within hours. Artists who engaged authentically built loyalty that transcended traditional marketing. The connection felt genuine because, often, it was.

Colbie Caillat's mother served as her daughter's MySpace manager during the crucial early growth period, responding to messages and comments. "A

lot of people don't know this, and they're gonna be probably shocked to hear," Caillat later revealed in Stereogum's oral history of MySpace music, "but she was my social media manager. She would respond to a lot of people. A lot of people who thought they were talking to me directly were talking to my mom."

John Nolan of Taking Back Sunday described his approach to the platform: "What I would do personally with Myspace was periodically write these updates to fans and that would be a little more personal than what you'd put on a website update. I let people know how I was feeling on that tour or at that moment, if it was going well or if I was like worn out or if I was having a great time or whatever."

This direct engagement created expectations that would shape social media marketing for decades. Fans began expecting access, believing they had relationships with artists who acknowledged their comments and messages. The parasocial dynamics that define modern celebrity culture were established, in many ways, on MySpace profile pages.

## The Play Count Controversy

As MySpace's music features matured, questions emerged about the reliability of play count metrics. Could they be manipulated? Were they actually measuring genuine engagement or could they be artificially inflated?

The platform attempted to implement systems to prevent play count manipulation, but the effectiveness of these measures remained uncertain. Artists and managers experimented with various techniques—some legitimate, some questionable—to boost their numbers.

More fundamentally, play counts measured only a partial picture of engagement. A single play didn't distinguish between someone who listened to an entire song and someone who clicked away after five seconds. The metric conflated repeat listening by devoted fans with casual drive-by plays. It couldn't capture whether a play translated into album purchases, concert attendance, or any other commercially meaningful behavior.

Labels developed increasingly sophisticated approaches to interpreting MySpace data. Play counts mattered, but so did growth rates, geographic distribution of listeners, comment sentiment, and dozens of other factors that required human analysis to properly understand. The dream of purely quantitative A&R—of algorithms replacing talent scouts—proved premature.

Still, the metrics revolution had permanently altered the industry. No label would ever again sign an artist without first examining their online presence. The question shifted from whether to use digital metrics to how to interpret them properly.

## The Legacy Numbers

By the time MySpace's music dominance began fading around 2008-2009, the platform had generated statistics that seemed almost unbelievable in retrospect. Individual profiles had accumulated tens of millions of plays. Unsigned artists had built followings larger than many established acts. The platform had facilitated thousands of record deals and countless more industry connections.

The specific numbers—who reached what milestone when—became matters of intense debate among music historians. Documentation was spotty; MySpace's internal record-keeping was inconsistent; many early statistics were simply lost when the platform underwent various redesigns and data migrations.

What survived were the stories and the artists themselves. Arctic Monkeys' success could be quantified through album sales that dwarfed their play counts. Colbie Caillat's Grammy nominations and multi-platinum certifications demonstrated that MySpace discovery could translate into lasting careers. Sean Kingston, Panic! at the Disco, Lily Allen, Calvin Harris—their continued relevance proved that the platform's discoveries had been genuine talent, not merely viral flukes.

The numbers themselves became historical artifacts, snapshots of a moment when play counts and friend lists genuinely mattered to the music industry's gatekeepers. Within a few years, those metrics would be supplanted by YouTube views, Spotify streams, TikTok engagement. But the principle established on MySpace—that digital metrics could identify talent and predict commercial success—remained foundational.

## The Changing of the Guard

The transition away from MySpace happened gradually, then all at once. By 2009, Facebook had overtaken MySpace in overall users. YouTube was

becoming the dominant platform for music discovery. Spotify and streaming services were beginning to reshape how people consumed music entirely.

Artists who had built their careers on MySpace faced difficult decisions about platform migration. Some successfully transferred their audiences to newer platforms. Others struggled to maintain relevance in an increasingly fragmented digital landscape. The skills that had built MySpace success—profile customization, friend networking, message engagement—proved only partially transferable.

For the music industry, the MySpace era represented a dry run for the social media-driven discovery processes that would dominate the following decade. Labels had learned to monitor online metrics. Artists had learned to engage directly with fans. Fans had learned to expect access and authenticity. These lessons persisted long after MySpace itself faded from relevance.

The specific milestones documented during the MySpace years—first to 100,000 friends, first to one million plays, first unsigned artist to top the charts through online discovery—served as benchmarks for subsequent platforms. Each new service reinvented these metrics in its own terms: YouTube views, Spotify streams, TikTok viral sounds. But the underlying principle remained: digital engagement could identify talent, build audiences, and launch careers in ways that traditional industry gatekeepers had never imagined.

## The Enduring Impact

Two decades after MySpace's peak, the platform's music milestones have taken on historical significance beyond their original commercial implications. They document a pivotal moment in the music industry's transformation—the point when digital distribution and social networking converged to create entirely new pathways to success.

The artists who broke through on MySpace largely went on to sustained careers. Arctic Monkeys became one of the defining rock bands of their generation. Lily Allen continues to release critically acclaimed music. Calvin Harris evolved into one of the world's highest-paid DJs. Panic! at the Disco sold out arenas until their 2023 disbandment. The platform's discoveries weren't just early viral successes—they were genuine talents who happened to find their audiences through a new medium.

More importantly, the MySpace era established principles that continue to govern music discovery. Artist-fan connection matters. Online metrics have commercial predictive value. Traditional gatekeepers can be circumvented by artists willing to engage directly with audiences. These insights, first proven through MySpace play counts and friend lists, now underpin the entire digital music economy.

The specific numbers may have been lost to server migrations and platform decay. But the revolution those numbers documented—the democratization of music discovery, the empowerment of unsigned artists, the quantification of audience engagement—fundamentally reshaped the industry in ways that persist to this day.

Every artist who goes viral on TikTok, every singer discovered through YouTube covers, every producer who builds a following through SoundCloud streams—they're all working within a framework that MySpace pioneered. The band milestones of 2004-2008 weren't just early internet trivia. They were the founding documents of modern music discovery.

## Fun Facts

**The Spam That Launched a Career** - Ryan Ross of Panic! at the Disco was so persistent in messaging Pete Wentz that Wentz initially wanted to listen to their music just to tell them how bad they were. Instead, he was “blown away” and signed them immediately.

**The Two-Bus Journey** - Sean Kingston caught two city buses from Burbank to Culver City for his meeting with J.R. Rotem. His mother was in prison at the time, and he had borrowed a friend's computer to send the messages that changed his life.

**The Bathroom Studio** - Colbie Caillat recorded her early demos in her bathroom because she liked the reverb-heavy acoustics. Her mother managed her MySpace page, responding to fans who thought they were talking directly to Colbie.

**The First '90s Baby at Number One** - When Sean Kingston's “Beautiful Girls” hit number one in August 2007, he became the first artist born in the 1990s to top the Billboard Hot 100. He was seventeen years old.

**The Band That Didn't Know How to Upload** - Arctic Monkeys famously claimed ignorance of how to upload music to MySpace. Their fans created their

page and uploaded bootleg recordings, which accumulated over a million plays before the band released anything official.

**Skrillex's Origin Story** - Before becoming a dubstep pioneer, Sonny Moore was the screamo vocalist for From First to Last, recruited through MySpace messages. He would later use the same approach to discover artists for his OWSLA label.

**The Zedd Cold Open** - When German producer Zedd messaged Skrillex in 2011, his opening line was: "Hey, 99.9% of the EDM scene sucks, you're the last bit that does not, you're awesome and you'll like my music." He was signed shortly after.

**The Chart-Topping Debut** - Arctic Monkeys' "I Bet You Look Good on the Dancefloor" sold 38,922 copies on its release day alone in October 2005, debuting at number one on the UK Singles Chart without significant radio support.

# The Tech Stack Evolution

*From Two Dell Servers to Three Thousand Machines - A Technical Autopsy*

Every software engineer knows the feeling. You build something quickly to solve an immediate problem, cutting corners because you need to ship. You tell yourself you will fix it later, clean up the code, implement it properly. But later never comes. Instead, success arrives, and suddenly your quick hack is serving millions of users, and the technical debt you accumulated is coming due with compound interest.

This is the story of MySpace's technology, a story of brilliant improvisations, fateful decisions, and the crushing weight of scale that no one anticipated. It is a story that every engineer should know, because the lessons it teaches about technical choices and their long-term consequences remain as relevant today as they were two decades ago.

## Chapter Zero: The First Ten Days

In August 2003, the MySpace team needed to build a social network. Fast.

They hired Duc Chau, a software developer at Intermix Media, to create the initial version. Chau built the first MySpace in Perl, a scripting language popular for web development at the time. The site ran on the Apache web server with a MySQL database backend, a configuration that was common and well-understood.

The Perl version worked. But there was a problem: nobody else at Intermix knew Perl well enough to maintain and extend it. The other programmers were experienced with Adobe's ColdFusion, a different web development platform entirely.

About a month after launch, Chau left the company. The remaining team faced a choice: learn Perl or rewrite the entire site in a language they knew. They chose to rewrite.

Intermix brought in two developers, Gabe Harriman and Toan Nguyen, to rebuild MySpace in ColdFusion. This decision would prove to have consequences that nobody could have predicted.



During the rewrite, Harriman and Nguyen made what appeared at the time to be a minor oversight. They failed to block users from adding their own HTML and CSS code to their profile pages. In the security-conscious environment of modern web development, this would be considered a serious vulnerability. In 2003, it became MySpace's defining feature.

As Julia Angwin documented in her book "Stealing MySpace," this apparent mistake was what "allowed users to build colorful backgrounds and wallpaper and load them onto their MySpace pages. Suddenly teenage girls could decorate their MySpace page with hearts and glitter and smiley faces the same way that they were decorating their lockers and book bags."

A bug became a feature. An oversight became a competitive advantage.

## The Starting Architecture

The rewritten MySpace ran on infrastructure that seems almost comically minimal by modern standards.

The entire site operated on just two Dell servers, each equipped with 4 GB of memory and two processors. A single database server handled all the data storage. This was the foundation upon which a social networking empire would be built.

ColdFusion was not a random choice. Created by the Allaire brothers in 1995, the platform had been designed specifically to make it easy to connect web pages to databases. Its markup language, CFML (ColdFusion Markup Language), used a tag-based syntax that resembled HTML, making it accessible to developers who were not hardcore programmers. Tags like `<cfquery>` and `<cfoutput>` made database operations relatively straightforward.

For a small team that needed to move fast, ColdFusion offered genuine advantages. Development was rapid. Changes could be made and deployed quickly. The learning curve was relatively gentle. Integration with databases was built into the platform's DNA.

But ColdFusion had not been designed for massive scale. It was optimized for the typical corporate website or intranet application, not for a platform that would eventually serve hundreds of millions of users. This limitation was not obvious when MySpace had a few thousand users. It would become painfully apparent later.

## The First Crisis: 500,000 Users

By early 2004, MySpace had reached approximately 400,000 registered users. The two web servers and single database that had served the initial launch were struggling.

The database server could not cope with the load. Every user action, from logging in to posting a comment to browsing a profile, required database queries. As the number of concurrent users grew, the queries began backing up. Page load times increased. Sometimes the site became completely unresponsive.

Adding web servers was relatively straightforward, just purchase more hardware and configure it to serve the same pages. Adding database capacity was far more complex. You cannot simply throw more database servers at the problem without changing how the application works. The database is the central point where all the data lives, and splitting it up requires careful architectural decisions.

MySpace's solution was to implement what is called vertical partitioning. Instead of one database handling everything, they created separate databases for different functions. One database handled login screens. Another handled user profiles. A third managed blogs. When users demanded new features, MySpace would deploy new databases specifically to support them.

This approach helped distribute the workload. Read and write operations were spread across multiple machines instead of concentrated on one. The immediate crisis was resolved.

They also moved from storage devices directly attached to database servers to a Storage Area Network (SAN), a specialized high-speed network connecting servers to shared disk storage. This improved performance, uptime, and reliability.

## The Second Crisis: 3 Million Users

The vertical partitioning scheme did not last long.

The problem was that some data needed to be replicated across all the vertical slices. User account information, for example, had to be accessible

from every part of the system. As the user base grew, keeping this replicated data synchronized became increasingly difficult.

At around 3 million accounts, the MySpace team made a fundamental architectural shift. They moved from vertical partitioning to horizontal partitioning, also known as sharding.

In horizontal partitioning, the data is divided based on users. Instead of one database for profiles and another for blogs, you have multiple databases each containing complete data for a subset of users. The MySpace implementation assigned approximately one million users to each database server.

This approach had several advantages. Scaling became more predictable: to support more users, add more database servers. Failure isolation improved significantly. If one database server went down, only a fraction of users would be affected, not the entire site. Adding new capacity was straightforward.

The horizontal partitioning decision would prove to be one of the most important architectural choices in MySpace's history. As Dan Farino, who would become MySpace's Chief Systems Architect, later explained in an InfoQ interview: "One thing we did early on with the databases that has enabled us to scale is we have partitioned... one million users per database. So that enables scaling, adding new hardware is easy, and failure isolation."

## The Third Crisis: 9 Million Users

By 2005, with approximately 9 million users and climbing rapidly, the ColdFusion platform was reaching its limits.

The team began evaluating alternatives. Their conclusion was to migrate to Microsoft's ASP.NET framework, using C# as the programming language and SQL Server as the database.

This decision was controversial then and remains debated today. Why would a rapidly growing consumer website choose enterprise technology from Microsoft rather than the open-source LAMP stack (Linux, Apache, MySQL, PHP) that Facebook and other Silicon Valley startups were using?

Several factors contributed to the decision. The existing MySpace team had strong .NET developers. Dan Farino later recalled that "we had very, very good .NET developers coming on board." Microsoft was actively courting large web

properties, offering support and resources. The platform seemed stable and well-supported.

News Corporation, which acquired MySpace in July 2005 for \$580 million, may have also influenced the choice. Traditional media companies often had existing Microsoft relationships and were more comfortable with enterprise vendors than with open-source alternatives.

The migration showed immediate benefits. According to technical accounts from the period, 150 servers running the new ASP.NET code could service the same number of users that had previously required 246 servers on ColdFusion. The new platform used resources more efficiently.

But the migration also brought new challenges. The site was growing faster than the team could migrate it. For a period, MySpace effectively ran two parallel systems, with the legacy ColdFusion code and the new .NET code both in operation. Some legacy ColdFusion pages were even executed through Blue Dragon, a tool that allowed ColdFusion code to run on the .NET runtime.

## The 26 Million User Milestone

At approximately 26 million users, MySpace made another significant infrastructure investment: 64-bit technology.

The move to 64-bit processors and operating systems was driven by a fundamental limitation. 32-bit systems could address a maximum of approximately 4 GB of RAM. For databases and caching systems handling millions of users, this was a severe constraint. More memory meant more data could be held in RAM rather than read from slow disk storage. More memory meant faster performance.

SQL Server 2005, which MySpace adopted even during its beta testing phase, was the first version of Microsoft's database to fully support 64-bit processors with extended memory addressing. The rush to adopt a beta database product reflected the desperation of the situation. As one technical account noted: "This was the first version of SQL Server, supporting 64-bit processors with the possibility of extended memory. After that, memory was the only bottleneck in MySpace's infrastructure."

The infrastructure also evolved in storage architecture. MySpace moved from traditional SAN configurations to virtualized storage, treating the entire

Storage Area Network as one large pool of capacity rather than dedicating specific disks to specific applications. They standardized on equipment from 3PARdata, a relatively new SAN vendor that specialized in virtualized storage architectures.

## The Architecture at Peak

At its height, MySpace's technical infrastructure was genuinely impressive.

According to Dan Farino's presentations at technical conferences, the site ran on approximately 3,000 Windows 2003 servers running IIS 6. The application code was primarily .NET 2.0 with some .NET 3.5 components. The backend used SQL Server 2005 databases, upgraded from SQL Server 2000 to take advantage of 64-bit processing and extended memory capabilities.

The numbers were staggering. MySpace processed approximately 1.5 billion page views per day. At peak times, the system handled 2.3 million concurrent users. The site pushed 100 gigabits per second of data to the internet, with about 10 Gb/sec being HTML content.

Storage requirements were enormous. The infrastructure included approximately 4 petabytes of disk space spread across more than 17,000 individual disks. To put this in perspective, 4 petabytes is approximately 4,000 terabytes, enough to store roughly 80 million hours of MP3 audio or several hundred million user profiles with all their associated content.

Media content like audio and video files were handled differently from the rest of the infrastructure. These files were hosted on a distributed file system built using Linux, even though the rest of the infrastructure ran on Windows. The choice of Linux for media storage reflected the platform's strengths in handling file serving at scale. This content was served directly over HTTP, bypassing the .NET application layer entirely.

The database layer maintained the one-million-users-per-database partitioning scheme. With over 100 million users, this meant more than 100 database servers just for user data. Each database was replicated for redundancy.

The team developed custom caching infrastructure because standard SQL Server queries were not performant enough at their scale. As Farino explained: "We used to use just SQL server as a backend store. But database queries are

not performant enough to meet the scalability requirements of the site. So we ended up developing a custom cache here. It's basically object storage, all done through a custom sockets layer, all stored in unmanaged memory on a 64 bit .NET 2.0 box."

This custom cache addressed a specific problem with the .NET garbage collector. As Farino noted: "One of our original problems was with the .NET garbage collector. It is just really not designed even on a 64 bit platform to reverse billions of objects and collect and compact without causing at least a noticeable delay."

## The Operations Challenge

Managing thousands of servers required custom tools that did not exist in the standard Windows administration toolkit.

Dan Farino and his team built an extensive suite of custom operations tools. They leveraged PowerShell, Microsoft's new shell that could pass objects between commands rather than parsing text output as traditional Unix shells did. The MySpace operations team developed numerous PowerShell "commandlets" to support their specific needs.

One of the most significant custom tools was what they called their asynchronous communication technology. This was built to work around limitations in Windows networking when trying to treat large numbers of servers as a coordinated group. The system could ship a C# source file to a server, compile it remotely, run it, and ship the response back. This enabled a level of distributed administration that Windows did not support out of the box.

Another critical tool was "Codespew," their code deployment system. In the early days, MySpace was pushing code updates approximately five times per day. This frequency was necessary to keep up with rapid feature development and urgent bug fixes, but it was also risky. Each deployment was an opportunity for something to go wrong.

Over time, as the system stabilized and the risks of frequent deployments became clearer, MySpace reduced their release cadence to approximately once per week. This reflected both improved stability and increased caution about making changes to a system that was difficult to test comprehensively.

The monitoring infrastructure was equally custom. Standard monitoring tools could not handle the scale or provide the specific insights the team

needed. Farino developed performance counter monitoring systems, system profilers, and live debugging tools. These allowed the operations team to identify problems quickly and drill down into specific servers or processes that were causing issues.

## The Samy Worm: A Security Wake-Up Call

On October 4, 2005, a nineteen-year-old hacker named Samy Kamkar unleashed what would become one of the fastest-spreading computer worms in internet history.

Kamkar had discovered that MySpace's filters, which were supposed to prevent malicious code in user profiles, could be bypassed. The site blocked `<script>` tags and most other dangerous HTML elements. But some browsers, including Internet Explorer, allowed JavaScript to be embedded within CSS tags. By breaking the word "javascript" across two lines, Kamkar was able to inject executable code into his profile.

The code he created was clever in its simplicity. When someone visited his profile, the script would execute in their browser. It would automatically send Kamkar a friend request and add the text "but most of all, samy is my hero" to the visitor's profile. Critically, the script also copied itself into the visitor's profile, meaning anyone who viewed that infected profile would themselves become infected.

Kamkar uploaded his code and went to bed expecting maybe a few dozen new friends. He woke up to 221 friend requests. Within hours, the numbers were doubling exponentially. By 9:30 PM on October 5, just twenty hours after the worm was released, over one million users had been infected. The infection rate at its peak was thousands of new victims every few seconds.

MySpace had to take the entire site offline to remove the worm and fix the vulnerability. When the site came back up, Kamkar's profile had been deleted.

The worm itself was relatively harmless. It did not steal passwords, corrupt data, or destroy anything. But as security expert Jeremiah Grossman noted, Kamkar "had the ability to do whatever he wanted." A malicious attacker using the same technique could have taken over accounts, stolen personal information, or caused far more serious damage.

According to Kunal Anand, who became MySpace's director of security

shortly after the incident, the company at the time had “almost no security team” and “had no idea what to do.”

The Samy worm was a turning point for web security. At the time of the attack, an estimated 80 to 90 percent of websites were vulnerable to similar cross-site scripting (XSS) attacks. The incident led directly to the creation of the OWASP AntiSamy Project, an effort to create APIs that would allow sites to permit user-submitted code without exposing themselves to XSS vulnerabilities.

Kamkar would later face serious consequences. He was sentenced to three years of felony probation, 720 hours of community service, \$20,000 in restitution payments to MySpace, and was banned from using the internet for personal reasons during his probation. Every Saturday at 5 AM, he put on an orange jumpsuit and collected trash with the Santa Monica waste management team.

Years later, Kamkar became one of the most respected white-hat hackers and security researchers in the world, creating numerous security tools and research projects. In the hacker community, he is treated with reverence.

## The November 2006 Breakdown

By November 2006, MySpace had reached approximately 140 million users. The infrastructure was strained to its limits.

The specific problem that emerged was the SQL Server connection limit. The number of simultaneous database connections that the system required exceeded what SQL Server could handle. Worse, the Windows 2003 servers had built-in protection against denial-of-service attacks that would automatically shut down servers receiving too many connections.

The protection mechanism began triggering falsely. The servers interpreted the legitimate traffic from MySpace’s massive user base as a denial-of-service attack and shut themselves down. Users started seeing error messages constantly. At peak load times, between 20 and 40 percent of login attempts failed with an “Unexpected Error” message.

This was catastrophic for a consumer web service. The industry average for such failures was around 1 percent. MySpace was experiencing failure rates twenty to forty times higher than acceptable.



The engineering team scrambled to address the issues. Database configurations were tuned. Connection pooling was optimized. The Windows servers were reconfigured to increase the thresholds for automatic shutdown. But the fundamental problem remained: the infrastructure was built for a scale that MySpace had long since exceeded.

## Data Integrity Nightmares

One revealing metric emerged years later when Christa Stelzmuller, who became MySpace's Chief Data Architect after joining from Yahoo, spoke about the challenges she inherited.

When she arrived at MySpace around 2007, the system was experiencing more than 2 million data integrity errors per day. Two million daily incidents where the data in the databases did not match what it should be. Two million opportunities for users to see wrong information, lose data, or encounter bugs.

Through sustained effort, Stelzmuller and her team reduced this number to approximately 100,000 errors per day. This was a genuine technical achievement, an improvement of approximately 95 percent. But 100,000 daily data integrity errors was still an enormous number for a production system.

The data integrity problems were symptoms of the deeper architectural challenges. The system had been built quickly, scaled rapidly, and modified constantly. Technical debt had accumulated layer upon layer. Code that nobody fully understood was running in production. Databases that had been designed for one purpose were now serving others.

## The Hundreds of Hacks

Perhaps the most damning description of MySpace's technical state came from insiders who described the codebase as having "hundreds of hacks to make it scale that no one wants to touch."

This phrase, reported by Robert Scoble and others who spoke with MySpace employees, captured the essence of the problem. Over years of rapid growth and constant firefighting, the engineering team had implemented countless workarounds, patches, and quick fixes. Each one solved an immediate problem. Collectively, they created a system that was almost impossible to modify or improve.

As Scoble reported: “Workers inside MySpace tell me that this infrastructure... is hamstringing their ability to really compete.” MySpace’s CEO Mike Jones reportedly said off the record that they “can’t change their technology to really make new features work or make dramatically new experiences.”

This is the textbook definition of technical debt reaching a critical level. When your technology choices prevent you from building new features, when your codebase is so fragile that changes are dangerous, when your best engineers spend all their time maintaining rather than innovating, you have a problem that money alone cannot solve.

## The LAMP Advantage

While MySpace struggled with its Microsoft-based infrastructure, Facebook was building a very different technology stack.

Facebook used the LAMP stack: Linux for the operating system, Apache for the web server, MySQL for the database, and PHP for the application code. This combination was entirely open-source, meaning there were no licensing costs. More importantly, it was the stack that most Silicon Valley engineers knew best.

The talent pool difference was significant. In Los Angeles, where MySpace was headquartered, there were plenty of developers who knew Microsoft technologies. But the developers who had experience scaling consumer web applications at massive scale, the engineers who had worked at Google or Yahoo or the early social networks, these people generally knew Linux and open-source tools. They were concentrated in Silicon Valley, and they were more likely to want to work with technologies they were familiar with.

As Robert Scoble, who had worked at Microsoft before becoming an independent tech commentator, observed: “Facebook had made bets on LAMP and that let them hire quicker and find people who knew how to scale that stuff up big time.”

The geographic factor compounded the technology factor. Silicon Valley had a concentration of engineers who understood both the LAMP stack and the specific challenges of scaling consumer web applications. Los Angeles had a different talent pool, one more oriented toward media and entertainment companies, with different technical backgrounds and preferences.

Facebook’s technical approach was also more aggressive about custom solutions. When PHP was not fast enough, they built HipHop to compile PHP

into C++. When existing caching solutions were insufficient, they contributed heavily to memcached development. When databases became bottlenecks, they developed sophisticated sharding strategies and eventually built their own storage systems.

Interestingly, Facebook also used some Linux-based components for specific purposes. MySpace itself acknowledged this by hosting its media content (audio and video files) on a distributed file system built using Linux, served over HTTP. Even within a predominantly Microsoft environment, Linux had a role to play for certain workloads.

This is not to say that the Microsoft stack was inherently incapable of scaling. Microsoft's own properties, including Hotmail and Bing, operated at massive scale on Windows and .NET. Stack Overflow and Plenty of Fish were successful companies built on Microsoft technology. The problem was not .NET itself. The problem was a combination of technical decisions, organizational factors, and the specific challenges of MySpace's architecture.

As Todd Hoff of HighScalability.com noted: "The stack isn't the real problem. That's almost silly. Look at Windows, .NET, etc and they are all quite capable of scaling if used correctly. Facebook started with LAMP, but along the way they changed everything about it such that it would be hard to say they were still using LAMP in the end."

The real question was not which stack was better in the abstract. It was which stack could MySpace's team, in their specific situation, with their specific constraints, use most effectively to compete. On that question, the answer became clear over time.

## What Could Have Been Done Differently?

Looking back, several decisions stand out as critical.

The early choice of ColdFusion was defensible given the constraints of the time. The team knew it, development was fast, and nobody anticipated the scale that would follow. But the decision to migrate to .NET rather than LAMP was more consequential. A different choice might have given MySpace access to a different talent pool and a more flexible architecture.

The timing of the migration was also significant. Moving from ColdFusion to .NET while the site was growing exponentially meant that engineering

resources were split between maintaining the old system, building the new system, and developing new features. This division of focus may have contributed to both the technical debt accumulation and the slower feature development that allowed Facebook to catch up.

Security should have been a priority from the beginning. The profile customization feature that made MySpace distinctive also made it vulnerable. The Samy worm exposed weaknesses that should have been addressed earlier. A dedicated security team from the start might have prevented or at least mitigated the damage. The lack of such a team, as Kunal Anand later acknowledged, meant that when a serious security incident occurred, the company “had no idea what to do.”

The location in Los Angeles, far from Silicon Valley’s concentration of technical talent, made hiring harder. Engineers who specialized in scaling consumer web applications were more likely to be in the Bay Area, more likely to know open-source technologies, and less likely to relocate to LA. This created a chicken-and-egg problem: the technology choices made hiring certain types of engineers difficult, and the available engineers reinforced those technology choices.

Architectural decisions also accumulated into constraints. The profile customization feature, while beloved by users, created significant complexity for the backend systems. Every profile was essentially a unique web page with arbitrary HTML and CSS that had to be rendered securely and efficiently. This increased the attack surface for security vulnerabilities and the computational cost for rendering. A more constrained approach to customization might have been less popular but more scalable.

But perhaps the most important lesson is about technical debt and organizational priorities. MySpace prioritized feature development and user acquisition over infrastructure stability and code quality. This made sense in the early days when growth was the only thing that mattered. But the bill eventually came due, and by then it was too late to pay it.

The engineers who worked on MySpace were not incompetent. By all accounts, they were talented people working incredibly hard under impossible constraints. The system they built handled scale that would have been science fiction just a few years earlier. The problem was not individual failure. It was the accumulated weight of a thousand small decisions, each reasonable in isolation, that collectively created an unmaintainable system.

## The Legacy

MySpace's technical story has become a cautionary tale in engineering circles. It is taught in courses about software architecture and technical debt. It is referenced in discussions about technology choices and their long-term consequences.

The specific lessons vary depending on who is telling the story. Some emphasize the importance of choosing the right technology stack. Others focus on the dangers of technical debt. Still others point to organizational factors like location and hiring.

Perhaps the most important lesson is also the most humbling: technical decisions made under pressure, with incomplete information, can have consequences that last for years. The ColdFusion choice in 2003, the .NET migration in 2005, the security gaps exposed in 2005, all of these were made by smart people doing their best with what they knew at the time. And all of them contributed to an outcome that nobody intended.

Every startup faces similar pressures. Ship fast or die. Fix it later. Technical debt is acceptable if you are growing. These mantras drive much of the technology industry. MySpace's story is a reminder that later eventually arrives, and the debt eventually comes due.

For the engineers who lived through it, the experience was invaluable. Dan Farino continued his career in technology. The security lessons from the Samy worm have influenced web development practices worldwide. The scaling strategies developed at MySpace informed subsequent generations of large-scale systems.

The site itself still exists, technically, though it bears little resemblance to the platform that once dominated the internet. The code has been rewritten multiple times. The infrastructure has been rebuilt. Most of the original technical team has long since moved on.

But the questions that MySpace's technical story raises, about scaling, about debt, about the choices we make under pressure, these remain as relevant as ever. In that sense, the technical autopsy of MySpace is not just history. It is a guide for the future.

## Fun Facts:

**Duc Chau**, the developer who wrote the original MySpace in Perl, later observed that the “network effect” began about eight months after launch “and never really stopped.” He had no idea his quick project would become one of the biggest websites in the world.

**The HTML/CSS customization bug** that became MySpace’s signature feature was an accidental oversight during the ColdFusion rewrite. Nobody intentionally decided to let users inject arbitrary code into their profiles.

**ColdFusion** was created by J.J. Allaire in 1995 and was originally designed to make it easy to connect HTML pages to databases. The platform went through multiple acquisitions: Allaire, Macromedia, and finally Adobe in 2005.

**At its peak**, MySpace pushed approximately 100 gigabits per second of data to the internet. For comparison, that is roughly equivalent to streaming about 10,000 HD video streams simultaneously.

**The Samy worm** infected over one million users in just 20 hours, making it one of the fastest-spreading pieces of malicious code in internet history. Its creator, Samy Kamkar, was just 19 years old at the time.

**Jeremiah Grossman** of WhiteHat Security estimated that 80-90% of websites in 2005 were vulnerable to the same type of XSS attack that the Samy worm exploited.

**MySpace’s custom cache layer** had to be built because the .NET garbage collector was not designed to handle billions of objects without causing noticeable pauses. The solution used “unmanaged memory,” meaning memory that .NET’s automatic garbage collection did not manage.

**The one-million-users-per-database strategy** was one of the few architectural decisions that held up well over time. It provided predictable scaling and good failure isolation as the site grew.

**Dan Farino** presented MySpace’s technical architecture at QCon San Francisco in 2008. His presentation, “Behind the Scenes at MySpace.com,” remains one of the most detailed public discussions of the platform’s infrastructure.

**Database errors** at one point exceeded 2 million per day. After Christa Stelzmueller joined from Yahoo, her team reduced this to approximately 100,000 per day, a 95% improvement that was still an enormous number by industry standards.

**The phrase “hundreds of hacks”** became infamous in tech circles as a description of what happens when technical debt accumulates faster than it can be paid down.

**MySpace’s code deployment** went from approximately five pushes per day in the early period to once per week after the infrastructure stabilized. This slower cadence reflected both improved stability and increased caution about changes to a fragile system.

**The Perl to ColdFusion rewrite** happened because the remaining team did not know Perl well enough to maintain the original code. This pattern of technology choices being driven by team familiarity rather than optimal technical fit would repeat throughout MySpace’s history.

**Blue Dragon**, a tool that allowed ColdFusion code to run on the .NET runtime, was used during the migration to handle legacy pages that had not yet been rewritten. This created a hybrid system where different technologies coexisted in ways their designers never intended.

**Robert Scoble**, who wrote extensively about MySpace’s technical challenges, had worked at Microsoft for years before becoming an independent commentator. His criticism of the .NET decision carried particular weight because he understood Microsoft’s technology intimately and had been an advocate for it in other contexts.

**The Samy worm’s punishment** included a complete ban from using the internet for personal reasons during Kamkar’s probation. He was only permitted to use one computer with no internet access. When his probation ended early in 2008, he walked to the Apple Store in Santa Monica, bought a laptop, and connected to the internet at the nearest Starbucks.

**PHP**, the language at the center of Facebook’s stack, was created by Rasmus Lerdorf in 1994 and was initially just a set of tools for personal homepage management. The language was often criticized by professional programmers for its inconsistencies, but it proved enormously successful for web development. Facebook eventually had to build custom compilers and runtime systems to make PHP perform at their scale.

**3PARdata**, the storage vendor that MySpace adopted for virtualized storage, was later acquired by Hewlett-Packard in 2010 for \$2.35 billion, validating the technology that had helped power MySpace’s growth.

# Lord Flathead

## The Knock at the Door

In 1984, personal computers were still a novelty in most American households. The IBM PC had only been released three years earlier. The Apple Macintosh had just launched that January. Most families who owned computers used them for simple tasks - word processing, basic games, maybe some educational software for the kids.

The average American had no concept of computer networks, of data flowing invisibly through telephone lines, of systems talking to other systems across vast distances. The internet, as we know it today, didn't exist for ordinary people. Email was something used by university researchers and military personnel. The World Wide Web wouldn't be invented for another seven years.

But in certain bedrooms across America, teenagers were discovering something far more interesting than Oregon Trail or Print Shop. They were discovering that these beige boxes could connect to other computers through telephone lines. And if you knew what you were doing, you could go places you weren't supposed to go.

Tom Anderson was one of these teenagers. At fourteen years old, living in Escondido, California - a suburban city about thirty miles north of San Diego - Tom had developed skills that most adults couldn't comprehend. He operated under the handle "Lord Flathead," a reference to a character from Zork, the popular text-based adventure game created by Infocom. In the game's mythology, the Flathead dynasty had ruled the Great Underground Empire with a combination of ambition and incompetence. It was the kind of obscure reference that marked someone as a true computer enthusiast.

The 1980s hacker scene was a strange subculture, operating in the shadows of an America that didn't yet understand what computers could do. These weren't criminals in the traditional sense - most of them were middle-class kids who had stumbled into a world where knowledge meant power. They traded information on bulletin board systems (BBS), shared techniques for exploring



corporate and government networks, and generally treated the emerging digital world as their personal playground.

The tools of the trade were primitive by modern standards. Acoustic coupler modems that required placing a telephone handset into rubber cups. Terminals that displayed only green or amber text on black backgrounds. Connection speeds measured in hundreds of bits per second - a single photograph at modern resolution would have taken hours to transfer.

But these limitations didn't matter to the hackers. What mattered was access. What mattered was knowledge. What mattered was the thrill of going somewhere you weren't supposed to be and seeing things you weren't supposed to see.

Tom was good at it. Perhaps too good.

According to interviews Tom gave years later, he found a vulnerability in Chase Manhattan Bank's network security. The details of exactly how he got in have never been publicly documented - Tom has been understandably vague about the specifics, even decades later. What we know is that he accessed systems he wasn't authorized to access.

He didn't steal money. He didn't alter records. He didn't commit fraud. By his own account, he simply explored - looked around at what was there, examined how the systems worked, and then moved on. In the hacker ethic of the time, this was considered relatively benign. Information wanted to be free, or so the saying went. Looking wasn't the same as taking.

Chase Manhattan Bank saw it differently. This was one of the largest financial institutions in the United States. Their computer systems contained sensitive financial data for millions of customers. An unauthorized intruder - even one who claimed to be "just looking" - represented a serious security breach.

When they discovered the intrusion and traced it back to a teenager in Southern California, they contacted the FBI.

## The FBI Comes Calling

The Federal Bureau of Investigation in 1984 was still figuring out how to handle computer crimes. The agency had been founded in 1908 to investigate banking crimes, antitrust violations, and eventually organized crime. Computers were

a new frontier, and the legal framework for prosecuting computer crimes was virtually nonexistent.

The Computer Fraud and Abuse Act wouldn't be passed until 1986, partially in response to cases like Tom's. When the FBI showed up at the Anderson family home, they were operating in something of a legal gray area. Unauthorized access to a computer system was clearly wrong, but exactly how wrong - and what the appropriate punishment should be - remained unclear.

FBI agents knocked on the door of the Anderson family home in Escondido. Tom's computer equipment was confiscated - the machine he had used to explore Chase Manhattan's systems, along with any storage media, printouts, and notes. He was questioned about his activities, his methods, his contacts in the hacker community.

The exact details of what followed aren't part of the public record. Tom has spoken about the incident in general terms but hasn't provided a detailed account of the investigation or its resolution. What we know is that because Tom was a minor - just fourteen years old - he avoided criminal prosecution. The legal system in 1984 wasn't equipped to send a teenager to prison for computer crimes that didn't involve theft or destruction.

In later interviews, Tom described this experience as a turning point in his life. Getting caught, having federal agents show up at his family's home, watching his equipment get carried out the door - it was a wake-up call. The hacking hobby that had seemed like harmless exploration suddenly had very real consequences. Actions in the digital world could result in men with badges showing up in the physical world.

Some teenage hackers responded to such experiences by becoming more careful, by covering their tracks better, by going deeper underground. Tom apparently took a different lesson. He channeled his energy and curiosity in other directions, maintaining his interest in technology but stepping back from the illegal aspects of hacker culture.

## The Cracker Connection

Tom wasn't operating in isolation during his hacking years. The 1980s hacker underground was a tight-knit community, connected through bulletin board systems and shared knowledge. Despite the primitive technology, information flowed remarkably freely among those who knew where to look.

One of Tom's known associates from this period was Bill Landreth, who operated under the handle "The Cracker." Landreth was something of a legend in hacker circles - a prodigy who had begun programming at age ten and had developed skills that far exceeded most adult computer professionals.

Landreth had broken into systems belonging to GTE Telenet, one of the first public packet-switched networks. He had accessed NASA computers. He had explored military contractors' systems. His exploits were whispered about on bulletin boards across the country.

In 1983, at age eighteen, Landreth was arrested. His case became one of the first high-profile computer crime prosecutions in American history. He eventually pleaded guilty to accessing computer systems without authorization and received probation rather than prison time - partly because, like Tom, he hadn't stolen anything or caused deliberate damage.

Landreth wrote a book about his experiences called "Out of the Inner Circle," published in 1985. The book provided one of the first inside looks at the hacker subculture - how they communicated, what motivated them, what techniques they used. It became required reading for anyone interested in computer security, whether they wanted to improve it or circumvent it.

The book's title referred to the Inner Circle, a loose organization of elite hackers who shared information and techniques. Landreth's account demystified the hacker world while also revealing its sophistication. These weren't random troublemakers. They were methodical, skilled, and often more knowledgeable about computer systems than the people paid to protect them.

The connection between Tom and Landreth illustrates something important about Tom's early years: he was operating at a high level. This wasn't a kid playing around with basic computer tricks. He was part of a sophisticated community that was, in many ways, inventing the techniques that would define computer security for decades to come.

Bill Landreth's later life took a tragic turn. He struggled with mental health issues and reportedly went missing in 2007. As of the most recent available information, his whereabouts remain unknown. His story serves as a reminder that the hacker subculture, for all its intellectual excitement, could exact a heavy toll on its participants.

## Growing Up in Southern California

Escondido in the 1980s was a typical Southern California suburb. The city's name means "hidden" in Spanish, a reference to its location in a valley surrounded by rocky hills. Founded in 1888, the city had grown steadily through the twentieth century, reaching a population of about 65,000 by the time Tom was a teenager.

It was the kind of place where kids rode bikes to school, families went to church on Sundays, and nothing particularly exciting ever seemed to happen. The weather was perpetually pleasant - warm and dry, with the kind of endless sunshine that makes Southern California a destination for transplants from colder climates.

For a teenager with Tom's interests and abilities, this environment was probably stifling. Escondido offered little for someone fascinated by computers and networks. There were no tech companies nearby, no universities with computer science departments, no community of like-minded enthusiasts.

The hacker community offered something Escondido couldn't: a connection to a wider world, a sense of being part of something important, and an outlet for intellectual curiosity that suburban life didn't provide. Through his modem and telephone line, Tom could connect with people across the country who shared his interests. Geography became irrelevant. What mattered was knowledge and skill.

After the FBI incident, Tom apparently channeled his energy in more socially acceptable directions. He completed high school and was accepted to the University of California, Berkeley - one of the most prestigious public universities in the country and, crucially, located in the San Francisco Bay Area.

## The Berkeley Years

Berkeley in the late 1980s and early 1990s was a fascinating place to be young and intellectually curious. The university had been the epicenter of the Free Speech Movement in the 1960s, when students had fought for the right to engage in political activity on campus. That spirit of questioning authority and pushing boundaries still permeated the campus culture decades later.

The university itself was academically rigorous and politically engaged. Students debated everything from apartheid in South Africa to American foreign

policy to the emerging AIDS crisis. The campus was diverse, drawing students from across California and around the world. It was a far cry from suburban Escondido.

More importantly for Tom's future, Berkeley was located in the San Francisco Bay Area, which was beginning its transformation into the global center of the technology industry. Silicon Valley, just south of San Francisco, was already home to companies like Hewlett-Packard, Intel, and Apple. The venture capital industry was coalescing on Sand Hill Road in Menlo Park. Stanford University was producing entrepreneurs and researchers who would shape the digital future.

Tom chose an unusual major for someone with his technical background: English and Rhetoric. This wasn't a path toward a career in programming or computer engineering. It was a path toward understanding how language works, how arguments are constructed, how narratives shape perception.

At first glance, this seems like an odd choice for a former hacker. But in retrospect, it makes a certain kind of sense. Tom had spent his teenage years understanding how computer systems communicate - the protocols and languages they use, the ways information flows through networks. At Berkeley, he was learning how humans communicate - the techniques of persuasion, the structures of storytelling, the power of words to create and destroy.

The combination would prove surprisingly valuable. Building a successful social network requires understanding both technology and human nature. Tom was developing expertise in both domains, even if he didn't yet know how he would apply them.

The Bay Area environment also exposed Tom to the entrepreneurial energy that was building in the region. Sun Microsystems, founded in 1982, was growing rapidly and pioneering new approaches to networked computing. Silicon Graphics was pushing the boundaries of computer graphics, creating the technology that would eventually make movies like Jurassic Park possible. Oracle was becoming a database powerhouse. Cisco was building the networking equipment that would carry internet traffic.

And in 1991, something happened that would change everything: Tim Berners-Lee, working at CERN in Switzerland, created the World Wide Web. The protocols he developed - HTTP, HTML, URLs - would transform the internet from an academic and military tool into a platform for mass communication and commerce.

Tom couldn't have known, while studying rhetoric at Berkeley, that he would eventually help build one of the Web's largest platforms. But he was absorbing the culture and mindset of the Bay Area tech scene, even as he pursued a non-technical degree.

## The Musician

During his time in the Bay Area, Tom played in a band called Swank. Details about the band are scarce - they never achieved significant commercial success, and their recordings don't appear to be readily available. But the experience was clearly important to Tom, shaping his understanding of what independent musicians needed.

The San Francisco Bay Area in the early 1990s had a vibrant music scene. Punk and alternative rock were thriving. Venues like 924 Gilman Street in Berkeley had launched bands like Green Day and Operation Ivy. There was a sense that independent music could find an audience outside the mainstream record label system.

But finding that audience was incredibly difficult. The music industry in the early 1990s was rigidly controlled by a small number of major labels - Sony, Warner, BMG, EMI, Universal, and Polygram (before consolidation reduced the number further). Getting signed to a major label required connections, luck, and often compromises that stripped artists of creative control.

Radio airplay, essential for reaching a mass audience, was determined by a small number of program directors at influential stations. MTV, at the height of its cultural influence, had enormous power over which artists got exposure. The music press - magazines like Rolling Stone, Spin, and various genre-specific publications - could make or break careers with a positive or negative review.

For bands like Swank - talented but without industry connections - the path to success was nearly impossible. You could play local clubs, build a regional following, release records on small independent labels, and still never get the break that would take you to the next level. The gatekeepers controlled access to the audience, and they had no interest in opening the gates for everyone.

Tom saw this system up close. He experienced the frustration of creating music that he believed in, only to have no effective way to share it with a wider audience. He probably played shows to small crowds, sold CDs out of the

back of a van, and watched as less talented but better-connected bands got opportunities that Swank couldn't access.

This experience would shape his later thinking about what the internet could do for independent artists. When MySpace became a platform for musicians, it wasn't by accident. Tom understood, from personal experience, what artists needed: a way to share their work, connect with fans, and build a following without going through traditional gatekeepers.

## Film School and Storytelling

After Berkeley, Tom enrolled at UCLA's School of Theater, Film and Television. This was another unexpected choice - film school, not computer science, not business school.

UCLA's film program is one of the most prestigious in the country, consistently ranked among the top five in the United States. Alumni include Francis Ford Coppola, who directed The Godfather trilogy. Alexander Payne, who would later direct Sideways and The Descendants. Tim Robbins. Gore Verbinski. The list of successful filmmakers who passed through UCLA's program is extensive.

The program emphasizes storytelling, visual communication, and understanding how to connect with audiences. Students learn the technical aspects of filmmaking - cinematography, editing, sound design - but they also learn the craft of narrative construction. How do you introduce characters that audiences care about? How do you build tension and release it? How do you convey information without boring your audience?

Tom's time at UCLA gave him a vocabulary for thinking about user experience that most tech entrepreneurs lacked. Filmmakers obsess over pacing - the rhythm of scenes, the flow of information, the balance between action and reflection. They think about what audiences know and don't know at each moment. They design experiences intended to create specific emotional responses.

These skills translate directly to designing products that people want to use. A social network is, in many ways, a storytelling platform. Users tell stories about themselves through their profiles. They share moments from their lives. They create narratives about who they are and who they want to be.

Someone who understood storytelling - who had been trained to think about audiences and engagement and emotional resonance - would approach platform design differently than someone who only understood technology. Tom was developing a unique combination of skills: technical knowledge from his hacker years, communication expertise from his rhetoric studies, creative experience from his time as a musician, and narrative understanding from film school.

## The Dot-Com Boom

By the late 1990s, the internet had transformed from an academic curiosity into a commercial phenomenon. The catalyst was Netscape's initial public offering on August 9, 1995. The company, which made a web browser, had been founded only sixteen months earlier and had never turned a profit. But on its first day of trading, the stock price doubled, giving the company a market valuation of nearly \$3 billion.

The Netscape IPO signaled to the world that internet companies could be worth enormous amounts of money, regardless of whether they actually made money. Venture capitalists began pouring funds into any startup with a ".com" in its name. Entrepreneurs with little more than ideas and PowerPoint presentations raised millions of dollars.

The San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles both became centers of this frenzy. Startups proliferated - in office parks, in converted warehouses, in spare bedrooms. Office space prices skyrocketed as companies competed for real estate. Recent college graduates were becoming millionaires, at least on paper, through stock options in companies that had never turned a profit.

The logic of the dot-com boom was seductive. The internet was growing exponentially. Every month, more people came online. Every month, more commerce moved to the web. If you could just get users - lots and lots of users - you could figure out how to make money from them later. The land grab was on, and the winners would be whoever could grow fastest.

Companies spent lavishly on advertising, on office perks, on parties and promotional events. Super Bowl commercials for dot-coms became commonplace. The message was clear: the old rules of business no longer applied. Profits were for dinosaurs. Growth was everything.



Tom entered this world by taking a job at XDrive, a company that offered online storage. The concept was remarkably prescient - essentially what Dropbox and Google Drive would later become successful offering. Users could store files online and access them from any computer with an internet connection. In an era before cloud computing became commonplace, this was innovative.

XDrive had raised substantial venture capital funding and was growing rapidly. The company had offices, employees, and all the trappings of a successful startup. It represented everything exciting about the dot-com era: a novel use of technology, ambitious growth plans, and the sense that traditional business metrics didn't apply.

Tom wasn't a founder or an executive at XDrive. He was an employee, learning how internet companies operated from the inside. But the experience was educational. He saw how startups were built, how venture capital worked, how growth was prioritized above all else.

More importantly, he met Chris DeWolfe.

## **Chris DeWolfe: The Business Mind**

Chris DeWolfe came from a completely different world than Tom. Born in Portland, Oregon, Chris had followed a traditional path to business success. He attended Lincoln High School in Portland, then went to the University of Washington in Seattle, where he studied finance. After graduation, he entered the banking industry.

Chris's background was conventional in a way that Tom's wasn't. No FBI raids, no hacker handles, no band that never made it. Chris understood spreadsheets and business models and marketing strategies. He spoke the language of commerce.

But Chris had entrepreneurial instincts that banking couldn't satisfy. He enrolled in the MBA program at USC's Marshall School of Business, one of the top business schools on the West Coast. Located in Los Angeles, USC Marshall gave Chris access to the entertainment industry as well as the emerging tech scene.

During his MBA program, Chris developed a project called "Sitegeist" - an early concept for combining music discovery with social networking. The

project earned him an A, but more importantly, it planted a seed in his mind. Chris had identified something interesting: music fans wanted to discover new artists, and they wanted to share their discoveries with friends. The existing tools for doing this were inadequate.

In 1997, when Chris graduated from USC, the dot-com boom was just beginning to accelerate. Companies were raising money at unprecedented rates. The internet seemed destined to transform every industry. Chris wanted to be part of it.

He first took a job as VP of Marketing at First Bank of Beverly Hills, a respectable position at a respectable institution. But the dot-com world was calling. In October 1999, he joined XDrive as VP of Sales and Marketing.

## **The Partnership**

XDrive's office brought together people from diverse backgrounds - engineers, marketers, salespeople, designers - all working together in the chaotic environment of a rapidly growing startup. The company had the casual atmosphere typical of the era: informal dress codes, long hours, the sense that they were building something important.

Tom and Chris recognized something in each other. Tom had technical understanding, creative vision, and the ability to see possibilities that others missed. Chris had business acumen, marketing expertise, and the ability to translate visions into viable business plans. They were complementary in almost every way.

The dot-com boom felt like it would last forever. XDrive was growing. The stock market kept climbing. Everyone was going to get rich. In March 2000, the NASDAQ Composite index reached its all-time high of 5,048.62. The future seemed limitless.

And then, suddenly, it all collapsed.

## **The Crash**

The dot-com crash began in March 2000 and accelerated through 2001 and into 2002. The NASDAQ, which had peaked at over 5,000, fell to 1,139.90 by October 2002 - a decline of more than 75%.

The companies that had seemed destined for greatness disappeared almost overnight. Pets.com, the online pet supply retailer that had spent millions on Super Bowl advertising, liquidated less than a year after its IPO. Webvan, the grocery delivery service that had built expensive automated warehouses, burned through over a billion dollars before shutting down. eToys, Kozmo, Flooz, Boo.com - names that had seemed destined for greatness became cautionary tales studied in business schools.

The crash wasn't just about stock prices. Real companies with real employees went out of business. Thousands of workers who had left stable jobs to join startups found themselves unemployed. The stock options that had been supposed to make everyone rich were worthless.

XDrive was among the casualties. The company had a decent product and a reasonable business model, but it couldn't survive the complete collapse of investor confidence. When venture capital funding dried up and the IPO market closed, companies that weren't already profitable had no way to sustain themselves. XDrive went under.

Tom and Chris found themselves unemployed, along with tens of thousands of other tech workers in California. The easy money was gone. The parties were over. The future that had seemed so certain just months before had evaporated.

The dot-com crash was traumatic for everyone who lived through it. Dreams of wealth disappeared. Careers were derailed. The optimism that had characterized the late 1990s gave way to cynicism and caution.

But Tom and Chris had built a relationship at XDrive, and they weren't ready to give up on working together. They had seen what was possible with internet companies. They had seen how quickly things could grow. And they believed that, once the dust settled, there would be opportunities again.

## **ResponseBase and the eUniverse Connection**

In 2001, with the tech industry still reeling from the crash, Tom and Chris founded ResponseBase. The company wasn't glamorous - it focused on direct marketing, helping businesses reach customers through email and online advertising.

Direct marketing might seem like a strange choice for two people who would later build a social networking empire. But the work taught them invaluable lessons. They learned how to acquire users cost-effectively - essential for

building any consumer internet business. They learned how to analyze user behavior and optimize conversion rates. They learned what motivated people to click, to sign up, to engage.

ResponseBase was also profitable, or at least sustainable - a rarity in the post-crash environment. While other entrepreneurs chased venture capital that was no longer available, Tom and Chris built a business that actually made money.

ResponseBase caught the attention of eUniverse, an internet company founded by Brad Greenspan in February 1999. eUniverse owned various websites and online properties, including CDUniverse, an e-commerce site selling music and movies. The company had survived the dot-com crash, partly through aggressive cost-cutting and partly through revenue streams that didn't depend on advertising or venture capital.

eUniverse acquired ResponseBase, bringing Tom and Chris into the larger company. They were no longer independent entrepreneurs, but they now had resources - servers, funding, office space, engineering support - that they couldn't have accessed on their own.

## **Brad Greenspan: The Controversial Founder**

Brad Greenspan was a polarizing figure. Born in 1971 in Los Angeles, he had studied political science at UCLA before entering the business world. In 1995, he founded Palisades Capital, an investment company. Four years later, he launched eUniverse.

Greenspan was ambitious and aggressive, willing to pursue business opportunities that others might consider ethically questionable. eUniverse's revenue came partly from legitimate e-commerce operations, but also from software distribution practices that many users considered deceptive.

The company distributed programs like Keen-Value and Incredifind - software that installed itself on users' computers, often without clear consent, and displayed advertising or redirected web browsers. These programs were difficult to remove and degraded computer performance. Users who suddenly found their browsers hijacked or their screens filled with pop-up ads often had no idea where the software had come from.

This was the era before "spyware" and "adware" were household terms, before anti-malware software was standard on every computer. Companies

like eUniverse operated in a gray area, pushing the boundaries of what was legal and ethical.

In April 2005, New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer filed a lawsuit against InterMix Media (as eUniverse had been renamed), accusing the company of surreptitiously installing advertising software on users' computers. The lawsuit alleged that the software was installed without proper consent and was deliberately difficult to remove.

The settlement of this lawsuit would come later, after MySpace had already been sold. But the spyware business was part of eUniverse's DNA, and it created a complicated ethical backdrop for everything the company did.

Tom and Chris were employees of this company. They weren't directly involved in the spyware operations, but they were working within an organization that engaged in practices many would consider harmful to users. It's a reminder that the origins of MySpace were more complicated than the simple narrative of two friends building a social network in their spare time.

## The Friendster Opportunity

By 2002 and 2003, a new type of website was capturing attention: social networking. The pioneer was Friendster, launched in 2002 by Jonathan Abrams in Mountain View, California.

Friendster's concept was simple but revolutionary. Users created profiles containing information about themselves - name, location, interests, photos. They connected with friends, who also had profiles. And they could see their extended social network - friends of friends of friends - creating a visual map of their social world.

The appeal was immediately obvious. Humans are social creatures. We want to know who knows whom, how people are connected, who might be interesting to meet. Friendster made these invisible social networks visible and navigable.

Friendster grew explosively through 2003. At its peak, the site had millions of users, primarily in urban areas and among young, tech-savvy professionals. The service was featured in major publications. Venture capitalists were circling, recognizing the potential for a massive business built on social connections.

But Friendster had problems - serious problems that would ultimately destroy the company's potential.

The most obvious problem was technical. Friendster's infrastructure couldn't handle its own success. Pages took thirty seconds or more to load. Features broke constantly. Users would try to add friends and get error messages. The site would crash entirely, leaving users staring at error pages.

The "Friendster is slow" experience became so common that it spawned jokes and complaints across the emerging blogosphere. Users wanted to love the site - the concept was compelling - but the execution was maddening.

Even more frustrating for users, Friendster's management made decisions that alienated the community. The company launched a crackdown on "Fakesters" - profiles created for fictional characters, celebrities, bands, and abstract concepts. Users had created these profiles as a form of creative expression and community building. A "Fakester" for a favorite band or TV show became a gathering point for fans.

Friendster's management saw these profiles as violations of their terms of service and deleted them by the thousands. Users who had invested time in building communities around these profiles were furious. The crackdown felt arbitrary and authoritarian.

Tom and Chris watched Friendster's struggles from their positions at eUniverse. Here was a company that had identified a genuine human need - the desire to connect with friends and meet new people online - but was failing to serve that need effectively. The technology was inadequate. The policies were alienating users. The opportunity was being squandered.

They saw a chance to do better.

## **The Birth of MySpace**

The exact details of how MySpace got greenlit within eUniverse aren't fully documented in the public record. What we know is that Tom and Chris pitched the concept to Brad Greenspan, who approved the project.

The timing was right. Social networking was clearly going to be big - Friendster's growth proved that. But Friendster was stumbling, creating an opening for competitors. eUniverse had the resources to fund a new project. Tom and Chris had the skills and vision to build it.

The domain name “myspace.com” was already owned by eUniverse. Chris had acquired it earlier for a different project - a planned file storage service, similar to what XDrive had offered. That project never launched, but the domain name remained available.

“MySpace” was a good name for a social network. It conveyed ownership and personalization - this was your space on the internet, a place you controlled. It was easy to remember and spell. It didn’t have the awkward neologism quality of “Friendster.”

In August 2003, Tom, Chris, and a small team of developers began building.

## Ten Days to Launch

According to multiple accounts, the first version of MySpace was built in approximately ten days. This seems almost impossibly fast for a platform that would eventually serve hundreds of millions of users. But the initial version was basic - profiles, friend connections, messaging, basic customization options. Nothing fancy.

The team used Adobe ColdFusion, a rapid application development platform that had been popular in the late 1990s. ColdFusion allowed developers to build web applications quickly using a tag-based syntax that was easier to learn than traditional programming languages. It wasn’t the most scalable or elegant technology, but it was fast to develop with.

The priority was getting something live, not building perfect architecture. Tom and Chris had watched Friendster grow explosively despite its technical problems. They knew that in the social networking land grab, being first mattered more than being perfect. You could always improve the technology later.

MySpace launched in August 2003. The exact date isn’t consistently documented across sources - various accounts cite different days within the month - but the timing is clear. Just as Friendster was struggling with its technical problems and alienating users with its Fakester crackdown, MySpace appeared as an alternative.

The first users were eUniverse employees and their friends. This was common practice for new internet services - seed the platform with a core group of users so that new arrivals don’t encounter an empty space.

Tom created a profile, becoming the default first friend for every new user who signed up. His profile photo - a simple image of him in a white t-shirt, looking over his shoulder at the camera, taken against what appears to be a whiteboard - would become one of the most viewed images in internet history.

In later interviews, Tom described the “default friend” feature as a practical decision rather than a calculated branding move. New profiles looked empty and lonely with zero friends. Having Tom automatically added gave new users at least one connection and made the site feel less desolate. It also provided a point of contact - if users had questions or problems, they could message Tom directly.

This small design choice would have enormous consequences. As MySpace grew from thousands to millions to tens of millions of users, Tom’s face became ubiquitous. He was, quite literally, everyone’s first friend on the internet - a friendly face welcoming them to the platform.

The MySpace that launched in August 2003 was primitive by later standards. But it worked. Pages loaded quickly - much faster than Friendster. The features were straightforward and intuitive. And crucially, MySpace didn’t delete profiles or police user behavior the way Friendster did.

The foundation was built. What happened next would exceed everyone’s expectations - including Tom and Chris’s own. Within months, MySpace would begin its explosive growth, transforming from a small project within eUniverse into a cultural phenomenon that would reshape music, media, and social interaction on the internet.

But that’s a story for the next chapter.





## Fun Facts: Chapter 1

**“Lord Flathead”** came from Zork, a text-based adventure game released in 1980. In the game’s lore, the Flathead dynasty ruled the Great Underground Empire. Lord Dimwit Flathead the Excessive was known for his megalomania and wasteful projects - perhaps an ironic choice for a teenage hacker.

**Bill Landreth**, Tom’s associate from the hacker underground, wrote “Out of the Inner Circle” in 1985 - one of the first books about hacking culture. He later struggled with mental health issues and was reported missing in 2007. As of available records, his fate remains unknown.

**The FBI visit** to Tom’s house happened in 1984 - two years before the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act was passed. Tom essentially helped inspire the law that would later govern computer crimes.

**“Sitegeist”** - Chris DeWolfe’s MBA project at USC combined music discovery and social networking. It earned him an A in 1997. Six years later, he would build almost exactly what he had proposed.

**XDrive** offered online file storage in 1999 - the same concept that made Dropbox worth \$10 billion when it went public in 2018. The idea was right; the timing was wrong.

**ColdFusion**, the technology used to build MySpace, was created by brothers JJ and Jeremy Allaire in 1995. The platform allowed rapid development but would later cause scaling problems as MySpace grew.

**August 2003** was eventful beyond MySpace’s launch. The same month saw the largest blackout in North American history, leaving 55 million people without power. Mars made its closest approach to Earth in 60,000 years. And a new worm called “Sobig.F” became the fastest-spreading email virus in history, clogging inboxes worldwide.

**Tom’s profile photo** - the white t-shirt, the over-the-shoulder look - was taken in the eUniverse offices against a whiteboard. It wasn’t professionally shot or carefully planned. It just became, almost by accident, one of the most recognized images of the early social media era.

# The Business Mind

## Portland, Oregon

The Pacific Northwest in the 1970s and 1980s was a different world from Southern California. Where Tom Anderson grew up with endless sunshine and suburban sprawl, Chris DeWolfe came of age in a region defined by rain, forests, and a certain reserved sensibility.

Portland, Oregon, where Chris was born around 1966, sits at the confluence of the Willamette and Columbia rivers. The city had been founded as a trading post in the 1840s and grew wealthy on timber, shipping, and agriculture. By the time Chris was growing up, Portland had developed a reputation as a livable, unpretentious city - not as glamorous as San Francisco or Los Angeles, but solid and practical.

The culture of the Pacific Northwest valued hard work, education, and a certain modesty about one's accomplishments. People didn't brag about their successes. They put their heads down and got things done. This sensibility would shape Chris's approach to business throughout his career.

Chris attended Lincoln High School, one of the oldest high schools in Portland. Founded in 1869, Lincoln had a strong academic reputation and produced graduates who went on to successful careers in business, law, medicine, and public service. The school emphasized traditional values: discipline, achievement, preparation for college and career.

Unlike Tom, who was exploring the fringes of computer culture and getting visited by the FBI, Chris followed a conventional path. He was a good student. He participated in activities. He prepared for college. There's no indication of any rebellious phase or countercultural interests.

This isn't to say Chris lacked ambition or vision. Rather, his ambition expressed itself through traditional channels. He wanted to succeed in business, to build something significant, to achieve financial success. But he planned to do it through education, hard work, and strategic career moves - not by hacking into banks or playing in bands that never made it.

## University of Washington

After graduating from Lincoln High School, Chris enrolled at the University of Washington in Seattle. The choice made geographic and practical sense - UW was one of the best public universities in the region, with a strong business program and reasonable tuition for Oregon residents who could claim reciprocity.

Seattle in the mid-1980s was beginning to stir with technological and cultural energy. Microsoft, founded in 1975, had moved its headquarters from Albuquerque to the Seattle suburb of Bellevue in 1979. The company was growing rapidly, riding the success of MS-DOS and its partnerships with IBM. Bill Gates was becoming a household name.

Boeing, the aerospace giant, remained the dominant employer in the region, but technology was clearly the future. Young people with ambition could see that computers were going to transform business, and the Seattle area was positioning itself as a center of that transformation.

Chris majored in finance, a practical choice that would provide a foundation for a business career. Finance education in the 1980s focused on traditional topics: accounting principles, investment analysis, corporate financial management, banking operations. Students learned to read balance sheets, evaluate investment opportunities, and understand how money flowed through organizations.

The curriculum didn't include much about technology or the internet - the World Wide Web wouldn't be invented until 1991, and the commercial internet was years away. But Chris was learning the fundamentals of how businesses work, how value is created, and how decisions get made. These skills would prove essential regardless of what industry he eventually entered.

Chris graduated from the University of Washington in 1988 with his finance degree. The economy was strong, and opportunities were plentiful for graduates with business credentials. Chris entered the banking industry, beginning a career that would eventually lead him to places he couldn't have imagined.

## The Banking Years

The late 1980s and early 1990s were a turbulent time for American banking. The savings and loan crisis, triggered by deregulation and risky lending practices,

resulted in the failure of over a thousand financial institutions. Banks that had seemed stable for decades collapsed almost overnight. The federal government spent over \$100 billion bailing out depositors and cleaning up the mess.

For a young finance professional, this environment was both challenging and educational. Chris learned about risk management - not just from textbooks, but from watching institutions fail because they had taken on risks they didn't fully understand. He learned about the importance of sound fundamentals, of not getting caught up in speculative bubbles, of building businesses on solid foundations.

The specific details of Chris's banking career before business school aren't extensively documented in public sources. What we know is that he worked in the industry for several years, gaining experience in marketing and operations. He was good at his job, advancing to positions of responsibility. But he wanted more.

Banking in the early 1990s was a mature industry. The career path was well-defined: work hard, get promoted, eventually reach a senior position, retire with a pension. It was stable, respectable, and utterly predictable.

Chris had entrepreneurial instincts that banking couldn't satisfy. He wanted to build something, not just manage something that already existed. He wanted to be part of the new economy that was emerging, not the old economy that was slowly being disrupted.

The decision to go back to school for an MBA was a calculated bet on his future. It would cost money and time, but it would open doors that banking couldn't. And crucially, it would bring him to Los Angeles, where the entertainment industry and the emerging technology sector were beginning to intersect in interesting ways.

## **USC Marshall School of Business**

In the mid-1990s, Chris enrolled in the MBA program at the University of Southern California's Marshall School of Business. USC Marshall was one of the top business schools on the West Coast, known for its strong connections to the entertainment industry and its entrepreneurial focus.

Los Angeles in 1995 was a city in transition. The entertainment industry - movies, television, music - remained the dominant economic force. But

technology was beginning to make inroads. The internet, newly opened to commercial use, was creating opportunities that hadn't existed before. Startups were forming. Venture capitalists were starting to pay attention.

The Netscape IPO happened in August 1995, during Chris's time at USC. The browser company's spectacular debut on the stock market - shares doubling on the first day of trading - signaled the beginning of the dot-com boom. Suddenly, internet companies were hot. Anyone with a good idea and a website could potentially become a millionaire.

The Marshall MBA program exposed Chris to this emerging world while also grounding him in business fundamentals. He studied marketing, strategy, finance, operations - all the traditional MBA subjects. But he also had opportunities to explore new business models and think about how technology was changing the rules of competition.

## **Sitegeist: The Idea That Earned an A**

During his time at USC Marshall, Chris developed a project that would prove prophetic. Called "Sitegeist," the project combined two of Chris's interests: music and the emerging possibilities of the internet.

The concept was straightforward: create an online platform where music fans could discover new artists and share their discoveries with friends. Users would create profiles, indicate their musical preferences, and receive recommendations based on their tastes and the tastes of people with similar profiles.

In 1996 or 1997, when Chris was developing this project, such a platform didn't exist. The music industry was still dominated by traditional gatekeepers - record labels, radio stations, MTV. Fans discovered new music through these channels or through word of mouth. The idea of using the internet to connect fans directly with artists, bypassing the gatekeepers entirely, was revolutionary.

Chris's Sitegeist project earned him an A. His professors recognized the potential of the concept, even if the technology to fully realize it wasn't quite ready yet. Music discovery and social networking - two ideas that would eventually combine to make MySpace a cultural phenomenon - were already percolating in Chris's mind years before MySpace launched.

The timing of the Sitegeist project is significant. In 1997, most Americans didn't have internet access. Those who did connected through dial-up modems

at painfully slow speeds. Streaming music was essentially impossible - it would take minutes or hours to download a single song. The infrastructure to support a music-focused social network simply didn't exist.

But Chris could see where things were heading. He understood that bandwidth would improve, that more people would come online, that the internet would eventually become a viable platform for media distribution. Sitegeist was ahead of its time, but the time would eventually come.

Chris graduated from USC Marshall in 1997 with his MBA. He had new credentials, new connections, and a clearer vision of what he wanted to build. The question was how to get there.

## **First Bank of Beverly Hills**

After graduating from USC, Chris took a position as VP of Marketing at First Bank of Beverly Hills. The job might seem like a step backward for someone with entrepreneurial ambitions - back to banking, the industry he had left to get his MBA.

But the position made strategic sense. Beverly Hills was the heart of the entertainment industry's financial world. The bank's clients included producers, executives, and celebrities. Chris was building relationships and gaining insights into an industry he cared about.

As VP of Marketing, Chris was responsible for attracting new clients and maintaining relationships with existing ones. He learned how to sell - not just products, but ideas and relationships. He learned how to understand what clients really wanted, which was often different from what they said they wanted. He learned how to navigate the egos and politics of the entertainment industry.

These skills would prove invaluable later. Building a social network requires understanding what users want and delivering it in a way that feels natural and satisfying. Chris was developing this understanding in the context of high-end banking, but the principles were transferable.

The late 1990s saw the dot-com boom accelerating. Every month brought news of another startup raising millions, another IPO making founders rich. Chris watched from his position at First Bank of Beverly Hills, successful by conventional measures but not part of the internet revolution that was reshaping the business world.

The pull of the startup world was strong. Chris had the business skills, the MBA, the experience. He had ideas about music and technology that he believed could work. What he needed was the opportunity to put it all together.

That opportunity came in October 1999, when Chris joined XDrive as VP of Sales and Marketing.

## **XDrive and the Dot-Com Dream**

XDrive was everything a dot-com startup was supposed to be. The company offered online storage - a service that let users store files on remote servers and access them from any computer with an internet connection. It was cloud computing before anyone called it that.

The concept was genuinely useful. In 1999, most people stored their files on the hard drives of their personal computers. If your computer crashed, you lost everything. If you wanted to access a file from a different location, you had to carry it on a floppy disk. XDrive offered a better way.

The company had raised substantial venture capital and was growing rapidly. The office was filled with young, ambitious people who believed they were building something important. The atmosphere was electric - long hours, intense work, but also a sense of excitement and possibility.

Chris joined as VP of Sales and Marketing, responsible for driving customer acquisition and revenue growth. It was a significant position at a significant company, and it put Chris at the center of the dot-com action he had been watching from the sidelines.

At XDrive, Chris met Tom Anderson.

## **The Meeting**

The exact circumstances of how Tom and Chris met at XDrive aren't extensively documented. What we know is that they worked together at the company and recognized complementary talents in each other.

Tom brought technical understanding and creative vision. His background as a hacker gave him deep knowledge of how computer systems worked. His studies in rhetoric and film gave him insight into how people communicate

and what engages them. His experience as a musician gave him empathy for creative people trying to reach audiences.

Chris brought business acumen and marketing expertise. His finance degree and MBA gave him a solid foundation in business fundamentals. His banking experience gave him understanding of how money and institutions work. His marketing roles had taught him how to attract and retain customers.

They were different in almost every way. Tom was creative, unconventional, with a hacker's distrust of authority and a musician's appreciation for the underground. Chris was polished, professional, with a businessman's respect for structure and strategy.

But these differences were complementary rather than conflicting. A successful company needs both vision and execution, both creativity and discipline. Tom could imagine what a product should be; Chris could figure out how to build and sell it.

The two men became friends and collaborators. They discussed ideas, shared frustrations about the limitations of their current roles, and began to imagine what they might build together if given the opportunity.

## The Crash Hits

In March 2000, the NASDAQ Composite index reached its all-time high of 5,048.62. The dot-com boom had reached its peak. Companies with no profits and questionable business models were valued at billions of dollars. Everyone believed the growth would continue indefinitely.

Then the music stopped.

The crash, when it came, was devastating and rapid. The NASDAQ began falling in March 2000 and didn't stop until October 2002, when it hit 1,139.90 - a decline of more than 75%. Trillions of dollars in market value evaporated.

The companies that had seemed destined for greatness collapsed one after another. Pets.com, famous for its Super Bowl commercials featuring a sock puppet, liquidated in November 2000, less than a year after its IPO. Webvan, the grocery delivery service, burned through over a billion dollars before shutting down in 2001. Hundreds of other companies - some with genuine products and customers, others that were little more than ideas - simply ceased to exist.



The human toll was enormous. Thousands of workers who had left stable jobs to join startups found themselves unemployed. Stock options that had been supposed to make everyone rich became worthless. The optimism of the late 1990s gave way to cynicism and caution.

XDrive was among the casualties. The company's business model was sound - online storage was genuinely useful, and the concept would eventually become a multi-billion dollar industry. But in 2000 and 2001, with venture capital funding dried up and the IPO market closed, companies that weren't already profitable couldn't survive.

Tom and Chris found themselves out of work, along with tens of thousands of other tech workers in California.

## **Survival Mode: ResponseBase**

The post-crash environment was brutal for anyone trying to work in technology. Venture capital, which had flowed freely during the boom, virtually disappeared. Companies weren't hiring; they were laying off. The smart money was in real estate or traditional industries, not internet startups.

Tom and Chris could have given up on their entrepreneurial ambitions. They could have retreated to stable jobs in traditional industries - Chris back to banking, Tom to something that used his education without the risks of the startup world.

Instead, they founded ResponseBase.

ResponseBase was a direct marketing company, helping businesses reach customers through email and online advertising. It wasn't glamorous. It wasn't going to change the world. But it made money, which in 2001 was no small achievement.

The company operated in a space that many people found distasteful. Email marketing was often synonymous with spam - unwanted messages clogging inboxes, offering products no one wanted to buy. But there was a legitimate version of the business, helping companies reach customers who had expressed interest in their products.

Tom and Chris learned valuable lessons at ResponseBase. They learned how to acquire users cost-effectively - essential knowledge for anyone building a

consumer internet business. They learned how to analyze user behavior, tracking which emails got opened, which links got clicked, which offers converted to sales. They learned about the economics of online customer acquisition.

They also learned about the darker side of online marketing. The line between legitimate email marketing and spam was fuzzy, and many companies crossed it routinely. The pressure to grow, to show results, to make money could push people toward practices that were legally questionable and ethically dubious.

ResponseBase succeeded well enough to attract attention from larger players. Specifically, it attracted attention from eUniverse.

## The eUniverse Acquisition

eUniverse, the internet company founded by Brad Greenspan, was looking for acquisitions that could strengthen its portfolio. ResponseBase had something valuable: a team that knew how to acquire users online and expertise in internet marketing.

eUniverse acquired ResponseBase, bringing Tom and Chris into the larger company. They were no longer independent entrepreneurs, but they gained access to resources they couldn't have assembled on their own: servers, funding, engineering support, and the backing of a publicly traded company.

The acquisition also brought them into contact with eUniverse's other operations, including some that would later become controversial. The company's involvement with spyware and adware - software that installed itself on users' computers without clear consent - was a significant part of its business model.

Tom and Chris weren't directly involved in these operations, but they were now part of an organization that engaged in practices many would consider harmful. It was a Faustian bargain of sorts: access to resources and opportunity, but within a company whose ethics were questionable.

The early 2000s internet economy operated in a legal and ethical gray zone. The rules that would later govern online behavior - privacy regulations, anti-spam laws, disclosure requirements - were still being developed. Companies pushed boundaries because the boundaries weren't clearly defined.

This doesn't excuse harmful behavior, but it provides context. Tom and Chris were ambitious people working in an environment where aggressive

tactics were common and legal constraints were minimal. They made choices about what they were willing to accept in pursuit of their goals.

## Watching Friendster

From within eUniverse, Tom and Chris observed the rise of social networking. Friendster, launched in 2002 by Jonathan Abrams, was demonstrating that people wanted to connect with friends online, to share information about themselves, to explore their social networks.

Friendster's growth was explosive. Within months of launching, the site had millions of users. The concept clearly resonated with people. Social networking wasn't just a niche interest - it was potentially a massive market.

But Friendster was struggling. The site was slow, constantly crashing, frustrating users who wanted to engage but couldn't because the pages wouldn't load. The technical infrastructure couldn't keep up with the demand.

Worse, from Tom and Chris's perspective, Friendster's management was making decisions that alienated users. The crackdown on "Fakesters" - profiles created for bands, celebrities, fictional characters, and concepts - angered the community. People had invested time in building these profiles and the communities around them. Deleting them felt arbitrary and authoritarian.

Tom, with his musician's background, probably paid particular attention to how bands were using Friendster. Artists were creating profiles to connect with fans, sharing their music and building audiences. But Friendster didn't seem to understand or support this use case. The platform was designed for individuals connecting with friends, not for artists connecting with audiences.

Chris, with his Sitegeist concept still in mind, saw the opportunity clearly. Social networking plus music discovery - the combination he had envisioned years earlier - could work if executed properly. Friendster was proving the social networking concept but failing to capitalize on the music angle.

The pieces were falling into place for what would become MySpace.

## The Pitch

At some point in 2003, Tom and Chris pitched Brad Greenspan on building a social networking site. The exact details of this conversation aren't part of the

public record, but the outcome is clear: Greenspan approved the project.

The timing was right. Friendster's struggles had created an opening in the market. Social networking was clearly going to be big - the growth demonstrated that. But the leading player was stumbling, alienating users and failing to scale.

eUniverse had the resources to fund a competitor. The company had servers, engineers, and capital. It had Tom and Chris, who understood both the technology and the market opportunity. And it had a domain name that Chris had acquired earlier for a different project: myspace.com.

The decision to greenlight MySpace was one of the most consequential in internet history. Without eUniverse's support, Tom and Chris might not have been able to build and launch the platform quickly enough to capture the opportunity. The window for challenging Friendster was open, but it wouldn't stay open forever.

Brad Greenspan's role in MySpace's creation is often overlooked in popular accounts, which tend to focus on Tom and Chris. But Greenspan made the decision to fund the project, to allocate eUniverse's resources to this new venture. Without that decision, MySpace might never have existed.

This would later become a point of contention. When MySpace was sold to News Corporation for \$580 million, Greenspan believed he didn't receive adequate credit or compensation for his role. He would spend years pursuing legal action and public campaigns arguing that the sale undervalued the company and that he had been unfairly pushed out of eUniverse before the deal.

But in 2003, those conflicts were in the future. What mattered was that Tom and Chris had the green light to build.

## **Building for Speed**

The MySpace team faced a clear challenge: build something that worked better than Friendster, and do it fast. The window of opportunity wouldn't stay open forever. Friendster could fix its technical problems. Other competitors could emerge. The first mover advantage in social networking was real, but so was the second mover advantage of learning from the first mover's mistakes.

The team chose to build with Adobe ColdFusion, a rapid application development platform. ColdFusion wasn't the most elegant or scalable technology,

but it was fast to develop with. Features that might take weeks to build in other languages could be completed in days.

The trade-off was technical debt. Code written quickly is often code that's hard to maintain and scale. The shortcuts that enable rapid development become constraints when you need to handle millions of users. But that was a problem for later. In August 2003, the priority was getting something live.

The team worked intensively for approximately ten days, building the core features of the platform. User profiles. Friend connections. Messaging. Basic customization options. Nothing revolutionary in concept, but executed cleanly and quickly.

Chris's marketing instincts shaped product decisions. The platform needed to be easy to understand, easy to use, and easy to share with friends. Friction killed user acquisition. Every barrier between a potential user and a signed-up user was a barrier that would reduce growth.

Tom's creative background influenced the approach to user expression. Unlike Friendster, which enforced relatively strict profile formats, MySpace would allow users to customize their pages. This decision would have enormous consequences - both positive and negative - as users discovered they could modify their profiles with custom HTML and CSS.

## Launch

MySpace launched in August 2003. The exact date varies across sources - different accounts cite different days - but the month is clear. The platform went live as Friendster was still struggling with its technical and community problems.

The first users were eUniverse employees and their networks. This was standard practice for new internet services. You needed a critical mass of users for a social network to be useful. If someone signed up and found an empty platform with no one to connect with, they would leave and never return.

By seeding the platform with employees and their friends, MySpace ensured that new users would find people to connect with. The network effects that make social platforms valuable could begin to operate.

Tom became the default first friend for every new user. When you signed up for MySpace, Tom was automatically added to your friends list. His profile -

with that now-iconic photo of him in a white t-shirt, looking over his shoulder - was the first thing many users saw.

The default friend feature was practical: it made new profiles look less empty and provided a point of contact for users with questions. But it also created something unusual in the internet world. Tom became a human face for the platform, a friendly presence welcoming each new arrival.

In an era when most internet companies were faceless corporations, MySpace had Tom. Real, approachable, apparently willing to be everyone's friend. It made the platform feel different, more personal, more human.

Chris, meanwhile, worked on the business side: marketing strategy, partnerships, revenue models. The division of labor that had made them effective partners at ResponseBase continued at MySpace. Tom was the product and community person; Chris was the business person.

The platform grew quickly from the start. Users frustrated with Friendster's problems migrated to MySpace, where pages actually loaded and profiles weren't arbitrarily deleted. Word spread through the online communities where social networking early adopters gathered.

Within months, MySpace had tens of thousands of users. Within a year, it would have millions. The growth would eventually surpass anything Tom, Chris, or Brad Greenspan had imagined.

But in August 2003, that future was still uncertain. They had launched a product. It seemed to be working. Now they had to figure out how to grow it, sustain it, and turn it into a real business.

The journey was just beginning.



## Fun Facts: Chapter 2

**Portland, Oregon** in the 1970s and 1980s was home to several future tech leaders. Besides Chris DeWolfe, the region produced Phil Knight (Nike), Tim Cook (Apple CEO), and Gus Van Sant (filmmaker). The Pacific Northwest's practical, unpretentious culture seemed to encourage building things rather than just talking about them.

**Lincoln High School** in Portland, founded in 1869, is the oldest high school in Oregon. Notable alumni include Carrie Brownstein (Sleater-Kinney, Portlandia), Mel Blanc (voice of Bugs Bunny), and Barry Bonds' father Bobby Bonds.

**The Sitegeist project** that Chris developed at USC Marshall in 1997 was essentially MySpace before MySpace - music discovery plus social networking. The A he received for it might be the most consequential grade in internet history.

**First Bank of Beverly Hills**, where Chris worked as VP of Marketing, was eventually acquired by Pacific Premier Bank. The Beverly Hills banking industry has always been intertwined with entertainment money - the same connections that would later matter for MySpace's relationships with artists and labels.

**XDrive's concept** - online file storage - would eventually become one of the most valuable services on the internet. Dropbox, founded in 2007, reached a valuation of \$10 billion. Box went public in 2015. Google Drive, iCloud, and OneDrive serve billions of users. XDrive had the right idea in 1999; the infrastructure and market just weren't ready.

**The dot-com crash** eliminated approximately \$5 trillion in market value between March 2000 and October 2002. At the peak, the NASDAQ was at 5,048.62. At the bottom, it was 1,139.90. The index wouldn't return to its 2000 peak until 2015 - fifteen years later.

**ResponseBase**, the direct marketing company Tom and Chris founded after the crash, operated in a space that was legally and ethically murky. The CAN-SPAM Act, which established rules for commercial email, wasn't passed until 2003 - the same year MySpace launched.

**eUniverse's** stock ticker was EUNI on NASDAQ. The company's involvement with spyware and adware would later result in legal action from New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer - the same Eliot Spitzer who would later become governor and resign in scandal.

**August 2003**, when MySpace launched, was also when Arnold Schwarzenegger announced his candidacy for California governor during the recall election. He won in October, proving that celebrity

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