

Viddy aims to build a fan base as the Twitter for videos

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During a recent appearance on the "Today" show, Justin Bieber was helping co-host Matt Lauer get up to date on the latest technology. "All you need to get is a Viddy account," the teen pop sensation said.

"A what?"

"Viddy. It's like a new app. It's dope."

Bieber is not the only one singing its praises. Called the [Twitter](#) for videos, Viddy has quickly amassed 38 million users since its [launch](#) just 16 months ago. Users shoot short [video snippets](#), known as "viddys," and upload them from their iPhones and other mobile devices for their followers to watch. Like tweets, viddys capture everyday moments, with one caveat: They have to be 15 seconds or shorter.

"Viddyographers" say Viddy has joined Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram as part of their regular social media rotation. But unlike those [San Francisco Bay Area](#) heavyweights, the video-sharing app is headquartered in Los Angeles, a growing technology region that has been waiting for one of its hundreds of startups to become a breakout hit.

"We have the ingredients to create what can become the next Twitter, the next YouTube, the next Facebook, and that's what we're setting out to do," co-founder and Chief Executive Brett O'Brien said. "Our ambition is very large."

Local tech boosters say if the free app reaches Facebook or Twitter heights, it would be the success story that L.A. needs to be taken seriously as a bona fide tech hub.

Investors - which include [venture capital firms](#) and such high-profile names as Bieber, Twitter co-founder Biz Stone, Shakira and Jay-Z's Roc Nation - say they see big potential.

"I'm into Viddy because I can just be me and show my fans the fun parts of my day," Bieber said in an email. "I'm big on talking with fans on Twitter and posting pictures on Facebook, but video is another level, and I like watching viddys my fans make for me."

The popularity of smartphones means millions of people are essentially walking around with mini camcorders in their pockets, said Brian O'Malley, a partner at venture capital firm Battery Ventures, which has invested about \$6 million in Viddy.

"Having so much of that video stay on those devices and never make it anywhere seemed like a big missed opportunity," he said. "Viddy had a really elegant solution. The simplicity of their vision as well as how the product came together just made a ton of sense to us."

O'Brien said the company decided to put down roots in Venice, a couple of blocks from Google's L.A. offices, to be at the intersection of technology and entertainment.

No wonder, then, that the app has become especially popular among celebrities, who are using the technology to connect with fans by giving them glimpses into their personal lives. Watch Taylor Swift play fetch with her cat or Britney Spears goofing around backstage during a taping of the "X Factor." Jessica Alba filmed her daughter Haven giggling uncontrollably in her high chair; a viddy of Bieber and his younger sister

singing his hit "Boyfriend" has netted nearly 40,000 "likes" and more than 6,600 comments.

"They say a picture is like a thousand words; this is like a million," said television personality Brooke Burke Charvet, a Viddy user since June. "It's really short and sweet and to the point and full of real-life moments."

Businesses are joining too. General Electric, Southwest Airlines and fashion house Diane von Furstenberg are using the app to promote their brands for far less than what it would cost to shoot a professional commercial. The casual approach also makes huge corporations seem more relatable, company officials said.

At Southwest, the low-cost airline has used its Viddy account to showcase the company's offbeat culture, posting guess-the-airport videos and clips from inside the cockpit. One vid featured a live bald eagle that had traveled to Kansas City, Mo., on a Southwest flight for a Fourth of July celebration.

"It's impossible to ignore a platform of 38 million users," said Brooks Thomas, emerging media coordinator at Southwest, who shoots and posts the airline's viddys. "Viddy was a no-brainer."

Viddy was founded by serial entrepreneur O'Brien, who previously started an online storage services company that was sold to AOL; JJ Aguhob, the former head of digital strategy and creative at Live Nation Entertainment; and Chris Ovitz, who used to lead business development at Ad.ly, an advertising network that connects celebrities and brands with consumers through social media.

Viddy, which has 20 employees, recently completed a \$30 million round of funding, bringing the total amount invested in the company to \$38

million. For now, the company doesn't put ads on its site or at the beginning of videos, with company officials saying they're focusing on growing their user base before determining how best to incorporate advertising. The company also faces competition from rivals including video-sharing app Socialcam, which allows for unlimited video lengths and has many of the same features as Viddy.

Like other social media apps, Viddy encourages users to follow one another, "like" their favorite viddys and leave comments.

Viddyographers can apply special effects like they would on Instagram photos, such as adding a black-and-white vintage filter or a red background; they can also set their videos to music. Viddys can be shared on Facebook, Twitter, [YouTube](#) and Tumblr, or sent to friends via email.

In January, Viddy had just 1 million users. It saw an influx of sign-ups in the spring after integrating with [Facebook](#)'s Open Graph. Currently the mobile video-sharing app is available only on iOS products, but the company is launching an Android version soon.

Even though the videos are limited to 15 seconds, Viddy users say the mobile format works well with their increasingly on-the-go lives. Many have gotten creative with their videos, contacting one another to do collaborations - for instance, with one person playing the guitar in San Francisco and another singing in New York - or incorporating stop motion, stunts and props.

Izayah Dutcher, a 16-year-old violinist, wanted to share his music on the Internet, so he joined Viddy and uploaded dozens of clips of him playing covers of songs from Katy Perry, the Beatles and Michael Jackson.

His viddys, shot on his [iPhone](#) from his Arizona bedroom, got a handful of views. Then Rihanna posted a comment after she watched Dutcher's

cover of her song "Where Have You Been," telling the teen, "I wanna share the stage with u one day." She continued the praise on her Twitter account, tweeting to her 20 million followers in June: "Please WATCH and FOLLOW this kid on VIDDY! He's genius."

Before Viddy, Dutcher counted his family and friends among his small group of fans. Now, "81,000 people are proud of what I do," he said, referring to his Viddy followers. "People I've never even met in real life want to know me and be my friend."

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