

# New social network for teenagers experiences a growth spurt

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The millionaire creator of a Facebook competitor for teenagers, Pascal Lorne needed, well, teenagers.

Six months ago, he urged young users of Vine, Twitter and YouTube who had large followings to try his social network, Let. The response was underwhelming, and his fifth technology venture was about to fail.

He was soon saved by two [young stars](#) on YouTube: Jake Boys and Jack Dail, who discovered the app on their own and brought with them thousands of users. With a growing user base, Lorne moved the company to Los Angeles from San Francisco two months ago to be closer to the [entertainment industry's](#) heart.

"Once you have your super, well-funded team and a critical mass of users, you need to get content," Lorne said. "I was spending four days a week in LA, and I said, 'I better just move.'"

His app, Let, is part of the latest crop of niche social networks that seek to capitalize on people's frustration with the lack of nuance in mass-market offerings such as Facebook and LinkedIn. Another upstart based in Los Angeles, iOS app Fameus, is trying to get off the ground in Hollywood by promising people in the entertainment industry a better way to connect with gigs and potential collaborators or crew members.

"LinkedIn is for suits, and there's nothing for creatives," Fameus co-founder Kent Speakman said. "Updating their IMDb pages is way more

important than anything on LinkedIn."

Several attempts to challenge stalwarts over the last several years, including many based on anonymity, have yielded only a rare success.

Recently, ad-free social network Ello quickly became a favorite among people who are gay, lesbian or transgender after reports emerged that Facebook was enforcing its policy of users attaching their real names to accounts.

As secrecy-focused apps such as Snapchat and Whisper have caught on, Facebook in particular has taken notice and is reportedly trying to develop similar services. The company also said it was thinking about how to better deal with its real-name policy.

With Let on track for 1 million users by the end of the year, Lorne thinks he's onto something. He recently announced his startup has raised \$600,000 in seed funding.

Lorne sold his previous company, Miyowa, for at least \$45.5 million in cash in 2012. The 72-person start-up built [social networking](#) and messaging apps for cellphone makers and service providers. There, Lorne realized teenagers had abandoned Facebook because feature innovations were dwindling as it became more a marketing platform and less a dating app.

Let's key play is turning Facebook's Like button into a "star." The total number of stars people receive across all posts is plastered on top of their profiles, and they have a chance to compete for spots on global and local leader boards.

Lorne has been meeting across Los Angeles with talent managers of young social media stars, telling them that the "game" elements of Let

will help their clients rise from, say, 1 million fans to 10 million. In doing so, he's almost playing Let as the text-centric companion to video-only YouTube. If he can get more entertainers on the network, growth from ordinary people should come naturally, he said. Among Let's investors is David Graham, who owns a tour of young video stars called PressPlay.

With so many young users on Let, Lorne wants to make sure his site is free from cyberbullying.

When Let took off, he arranged for 25 top users to take a two-hour online tutorial on enforcing 10 golden rules of etiquette on the network such as have fun, but don't make fun.

"We imposed the right karma from Day One," Lorne said. "If you put in a nice seed, it should grow up in a nice way. It just needs a little bit of fresh water every day."

Lorne is doing his part by messaging new users to find out why they joined Let and how he can help improve it, and by encouraging power users to personally reach out to new members to welcome them.

"As long as the CEO stays connected with his [users](#), he has a chance to stay alive," Lorne said.

At home with his 7-, 10- and 14-year-olds (and four chickens), Lorne is noticeably low-tech - he doesn't have a TV. But he says he's connected enough to youth culture to see why people barely old enough to manage a bank account have millions of fans online.

"It's the normal continuity of the talent industry - pageants, casting, all of that," he said. "Now, you can do it from your room without needing your parents' permission, and all of a sudden, you're well-known."

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