

Former Facebook Live manager bets on more private video sharing with Alively

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Vadim Lavrusik tried to send a video of his son celebrating his first birthday to family in Minnesota, but the process didn't exactly go smoothly.

Sharing the video via text diminished the quality, and the file size was too large to attach to an email. After working as a product manager for Facebook Live, Lavrusik decided to leave the company this year and launch Alively, an app that allows [people](#) to share recorded or live video privately with friends and family.

Social media users have harnessed the power of live video to stream protests or the aftermath of police shootings, but it's the more private moments that Alively is going after. The three-person startup, which was also co-founded by Ray Lee and Vincent Tuscano, has raised just over \$1 million in seed funding from Greylock Partners, SV Angel and other [venture capital firms](#).

"Because it's so raw and unfiltered, a lot of the moments you want to capture on live video would be mundane to most of the world, but they would be really interesting to people who care about you," he said.

Lavrusik, 30, sat down with The Mercury News to chat about the rise of live video, private sharing and life after Facebook. This interview has been edited for clarity and length.

Q: How is Alively different from Facebook Live and Twitter's

Periscope? In Facebook, you can change the audience for a live video in your settings by selecting friends, only me or public.

A: You could technically go into the settings and select a few people, but it's not easy, so people don't end up using it. One of the things I've learned is people's perception of how they share on Facebook has evolved over the last three years. People over time have become very fixated on how their content is performing, so they won't share things that have a low number of "likes," for example. There's not a way to "like" a video on Alively. The only feedback you get on a video is you can see whether someone has watched it and has commented on it. It was all intentional. We don't want this to be about people feeling like they have to perform or they're putting on a show. It's more about capturing everyday moments and sharing them live.

Q: Why do you think there's been a movement away from more public sharing to more private sharing on [social media](#)?

A: Some of it is a generational difference, honestly. These platforms that enabled us to share publicly sort of grew with millennials. It was this novel thing where you're sharing with lots of people at the same time. If you look at all the messaging apps out there, they're the most popular with teens. Snapchat, for example, started with sharing with a few people and then expanded so you can share with lots of people, but the product still feels very intimate. The younger generation prefers not only to communicate more privately but also through video.

Q: Social media companies like Twitter and Facebook have this built-in user base, and if you're starting a new company you don't necessarily have that. How do you plan to compete?

A: The plan is to not compete. What I mean by that is we very intentionally designed the product so you can't connect your other social

platforms to be able to find people. People already have a built-in network on their phone, which is called their "contacts." You're going to have your family, significant other or your closest friends in your contacts. We also let you send video to someone even if they're not on Alively. So it gives you a tool to send high-quality video that's better than what you would get on SMS. ... It's really challenging when you have companies like Facebook and Twitter that already have huge scale, because they can deliver an audience to those people who want to grow their audience or broadcast to lots of people publicly. We just need two of your friends who will share on the app.

Q: Social media companies are grappling with some complex issues, such as online harassment, nudity, terrorism and copyright issues. How is your company approaching some of the challenges, and do you envision facing many of them given that you're focused on more private sharing?

A: I think those challenges become much more prevalent when it's a public platform. People might want to spread propaganda, and there's a little more anonymity. I was watching a video with this sideline reporter on a platform I won't name, and some of the comments were just awful - from sexual innuendos to cussing. You would think people would be more civilized. It's not to say that we won't run into those kind of issues, but we already have some mechanisms in place that let you block or report people.

Q: When live video first came out a lot of people were asking if it was just going to be a fad. Do you think it's clear now it isn't a fad?

A: Live video has been around for a long time, but it's just become more accessible to people now. You could go live on your computer four or five years ago, but it hasn't been a great experience on your phone until the last year. ... Everything is evolving toward video. Not just video consumption but communicating through video. Imagine some of the

innovation that's coming down the pike with virtual reality and 360-degree videos. You're going to see live 360-degree videos. You're going to see live VR. It's going to be everything from premium content to these personal moments.

Q: So no regrets about leaving Facebook?

A: My only regret is I miss a lot of my colleagues there. We had some of the best people working on [live video](#). Super-talented people who I felt like I was learning a lot from the whole time I was there. If there was one thing I missed, that's probably the biggest thing, aside from the free lunches.

I always wanted to start my own company at some point. I'm an immigrant and I came here when I was 8 years old. When I was really little, my mom would just take any job, and I remember in the midst of raising four kids she started her own business. I think it inspired me to want to try it at some point. Even when I was a journalist or building products at Facebook, I liked the idea of creating and building something. It just felt like my mom had no excuses, (so) what are my excuses?

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Vadim Lavrusik

Age: 30

Birth place: Ivatsevichy, Belarus

Residence: San Mateo, Calif.

Position: Alively co-founder

Previous jobs: Product manager, Facebook Live & Facebook Mentions; head of media partnership programs, Facebook; journalism program manager, Facebook; community manager and social media strategist, Mashable; social media specialist, New York Times

Education: Master's in journalism (digital media), Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism; bachelor's in journalism, University of Minnesota

Family: Wife Krista, and two sons, Luke and Beau, with a third boy on the way.

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5 facts about Vadim Lavrusik

1. He emigrated with his mom and three siblings from Belarus to Minnesota when he was 8 years old. He speaks Russian fluently and loves to cook Russian food, borrowing recipes from his mom.
2. He was the first person in his family to graduate from a university, graduating summa cum laude from the University of Minnesota and then getting a master's from Columbia University, where he went on to teach as an adjunct professor for three years.
3. Storytelling, both written and visual, has always been a passion for him. He started writing poetry and short stories at a young age and had his first writing published when he was 11. He started his career as a reporter and journalist. Today, he's most passionate about enabling others to share stories and moments through video.
4. He loves all kinds of water sports (wakeboarding, surfing, wakesurfing), with skim-boarding being his personal favorite.

5. When he was 7, he "broke into" a local prison in Ivatsevichy on a dare by climbing over a 25-foot wall. One of his neighbors, who was a senior guard at the prison, brought him home with a big rip down his pants, which he snagged on barbed wire at the top of the wall.

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