

## Y Combinator Funding Application Summer 2012

Application deadline: 8 pm PST on March 29, 2012.

Please try to answer each question in less than 120 words.

We look at online demos only for the most promising applications, so don't skimp on the application because you're relying on a good demo.

Though we don't make any formal promise about secrecy, we will try to avoid disclosing your plans to potential competitors.

If you're about to answer a question by saying you can't tell us because the answer is classified or controversial, please tell us instead about an instance that isn't.

We recommend you **save regularly** by clicking on the update button at the bottom of this page. Otherwise you may lose work if we restart the server.

Your YC username:

marbemac

Company name:

Limelight

Company url, if any:

http://projectlimelight.com

Phone number(s):

240 418 2338

Please enter the Posterous url of a 1 minute video introducing the founders.  
([Instructions.](#))

http://mmccormick46.posterous.com/private/vyeqyAHfil

YC usernames of all founders, including you, marbemac, separated by spaces.  
(That's **usernames**, not given names: "bksmith," not "Bob Smith." If there are 3 founders, there should be 3 tokens in this answer.)

marbemac mmccormick

YC usernames of all founders, including you, marbemac, who will live in the Bay Area June through August if we fund you. (Again, that's usernames, not given names.)

marbemac mmccormick

What is your company going to make?

Limelight is a real-time news and discussion platform. It is an application where users follow and discuss topics with their social network. Limelight combines the real-time discussion component of Twitter with the visual aesthetic of Pinterest, and organizes media and discussion around a web of topics.

If this application is a response to a YC [RFS](#), which one?



For each founder, please list: YC username; name; age; year of graduation, school, degree and subject for each degree; email address; personal url, github url, facebook id, twitter id; employer and title (if any) at last job before this startup. Put unfinished degrees in parens. List the main contact first. Separate founders with blank lines. Put an asterisk before the name of anyone **not** able to move to the Bay Area.

marbemac; Marc MacLeod; 24; 2010, Tufts University, Bachelor of Arts in Computer Science & Economics; marbemac@gmail.com; <https://github.com/marbemac>, <http://www.facebook.com/marc.macleod>; VP of Technology at Abroad101

mmccormick; Matt McCormick; 24; 2010; Tufts University, Bachelor of Arts in Computer Science & Music; matt.c.mccormick@gmail.com; <https://github.com/mmccormick>; <http://facebook.com/matt.c.mccormick>; <http://twitter.com/alloutma>; Singer / Songwriter at All Out, LLC

Please tell us in one or two sentences about the most impressive thing other than this startup that each founder has built or achieved.

Marc: Programming since 14. At 16 I programmed and incorporated an online ecommerce company. I ran the company profitably for 1.5 years before I shut it down due to college commitments. I've used Limelight as my for fun programming 'learning' tool for years, writing a version of it in PHP (both Symfony 1 and 2 frameworks), Python (both Django and Turbogears), and now Ruby/Jruby (Rails/Torquebox).

Matt: As a senior at Tufts, my a cappella group (The Tufts Beelzebubs) auditioned for the first season of a new NBC show called "The Sing-Off" and was accepted. I sang lead on many of our performances on the show, and we placed second in the nation.

Please tell us about the time you, marbemac, most successfully hacked some (non-computer) system to your advantage.

At Tufts, students on the "unlimited" meal plan could give up one meal time (breakfast, lunch or dinner) to get \$10 worth of food at the on-campus store. I discovered that by going to the store no more than half an hour before going to the sit-down dining hall, I could get the store credit and still get a free meal. I would be lying if I said I only used this the first time.

Please tell us about an interesting project, preferably outside of class or work, that two or more of you created together. Include urls if possible.

We engineered a social planning app called The Whoot. It is extremely simple to use and helps people figure out what their friends are doing that night. It can be found at <http://thewhoot.com> and also has iPhone/Android apps.

How long have the founders known one another and how did you meet? Have any of the founders not met in person?

We have been roommates since freshman year at Tufts, so we've known each other for about six years.

Why did you pick this idea to work on? Do you have domain expertise in this area? How do you know people need what you're making?

A big, extremely ambitious idea is fun to work on. Most of the well-known social websites today focus on connecting users to each other. We feel this is only half the equation. The second generation of real-time discussion & news applications need to provide more organization and personalization. In short, they need to be smarter and better organized.

We picked this idea because we believe:

- 1 You want to see content about topics that interest you (i.e. Reddit, Digg)
- 2 You want to see content from your friends (i.e. Facebook, Twitter)
- 3 You REALLY want to see content from your friends/users about topics that interest you (Limelight)

Most of our domain expertise comes from first hand experience using existing social platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit. Limelight solves a problem we have every day, namely the inability to effectively discuss topics that interest us with like-minded people.

What's new about what you're making? What substitutes do people resort to because it doesn't exist yet (or they don't know about it)?

There is no popular solution that allows users to follow what is said about their interests in an organized manner. On Twitter you may be able to follow @JustinBieber's tweets, but you cannot follow tweets about Justin Bieber. There might be tools out there built on the Twitter API that allow you to follow tweets with certain hash tags, but that is not very robust and does not reach mainstream Twitter users.

Limelight organizes content around both the users AND the topics a person follows.

Substitutes include Reddit and Twitter. Reddit has some support for topics (subreddits), but puts little emphasis on user-to-user connections when distributing content. Increasingly, people are attempting to use Twitter for more organized discussion than originally intended. Our main goal is to dominate this space by providing a richer, more substantial social news and discussion platform.

Who are your competitors, and who might become competitors? Who do you fear most?

#### Main Competitors

1. Twitter – Twitter is fantastic at what it was originally built for – realtime small updates on the web. We fear them mostly because they clearly dominate the social news space. Twitter also has mobile apps (and a very rich api). We plan on adding mobile apps asap. The Limelight web application is actually built using an API we developed. We are in a good position to quickly create mobile apps that leverage this same rest api.
2. Reddit, Digg

#### Possible Competitors

1. Pinterest (only if they go through a major re-architecting)
2. Wavii (although they are not community-driven and do not focus on discussion)
3. Youtube, Vimeo (if we add video uploading on Limelight)

What do you understand about your business that other companies in it just don't get?

There is another dimension to organizing content socially. People may know what (topics) they want to follow without knowing who (users) they want to follow.

Example:

1. I follow iPhone 5
2. The lead iPhone 5 engineer posts the iPhone 5 specs

I would never know to follow the lead iPhone 5 engineer, but I DO know I'm interested in the iPhone 5. In addition, if I like what the iPhone 5 engineer posts, I can then follow him too! This adds an entirely new dimension, where you can find people using topics and vice versa. It maximizes the chance of the user finding new and interesting content that is relevant to their interests.

Twitter is the original online real-time discussion tool. While it got a lot of things right, it also got a lot of things wrong. Twitter was created when 140 characters of plain text was not only practical, but necessary. 140 characters and plain text is genius. It's highly sharable across all forms of media, and easy to digest. However, the requirements Twitter imposed on itself really limit what it can do now and in the future. It is difficult to organize billions of pieces of information, each of which only includes a few words in plain text. Twitter has a lot of noise and is not well organized.

Larger screens and higher bandwidth have created a demand for richer, more personalized experiences. There are more opportunities in the real time discussion space, and limelight is poised to lead the second generation of rich realtime discussion and social news applications.

How do or will you make money? How much could you make? (We realize you can't know precisely, but give your best estimate.)

Targeted ads. Since everything on Limelight is connected to one or more specific topics, we build an interest profile as users interact with content on the site. We will build a highly targetable ad system around these user interest profiles.

This ad system has the potential to be extremely accurate. Given this, we could make as much ad money as twitter or facebook, even with a smaller userbase.

If you've already started working on it, how long have you been working and how many lines of code (if applicable) have you written?

We've been working on this ~40 hours/week since September 2011. As of March, we will both be working on the project full-time.

The project currently consists of ~12,000 lines of code.

How far along are you? Do you have a beta yet? If not, when will you? Are you launched? If so, how many users do you have? Do you have revenue? If so, how much? If you're launched, what is your monthly growth rate (in users or revenue or both)?

We do not have a beta yet. One of the primary reasons we're interested in Y Combinator is to help us with our launch strategy. Therefore, we wanted to reach out to the program before launching. We'd greatly appreciate any advice on this subject.

If you have an online demo, what's the url? (Please don't password protect it; just use an obscure url.)

We've gone through two alpha iterations, however the newest is a vast improvement. We plan on having a stable, live version of Limelight online in mid-March. This will not be a public launch, but we can make it available to Y Combinator.

**\*UPDATE\***

We've put up a version at <http://projectlimelight.com>. You can sign up with the invite code "YC" (without parenthesis). Please keep in mind that this is an early version with incomplete and missing features. Let us know if you have any questions or trouble!

**\*UPDATE 2\***

We've created an account for YC. The login details are:  
username: YCombinator  
password: password

How will you get users? If your idea is the type that faces a chicken-and-egg problem in the sense that it won't be attractive to users till it has a lot of users (e.g. a marketplace, a dating site, an ad network), how will you overcome that?

Limelight is a community driven platform and does face the chicken-and-egg problem.

We are playing with the level of Twitter integration we want to implement. We could, at least initially, build Limelight solely off of crawled tweets. We would transform these tweets into richer, more organized limelight posts. There are several more Twitter integrations we could implement if we decide to go down the deep Twitter integration path.

Regardless of what we level of Twitter integration we decide on, we have several strategies to help overcome this problem:

1. Leverage existing communities as much as possible. Give users tools to easily re-create their existing networks from Twitter and Facebook. Generate a preliminary interest profile by scanning a user's tweets and/or facebook posts.
2. Organize groups of users to consistently post media and news in designated topic areas. With this in place new users will see interesting news and media on topics they're interested in. These new users will simply have to fill in the discussion.

3. Implement an invite system and only "open the floodgates" when a certain number of people have signed up for the beta. We would generate those initial signups by reaching users through blogs and social media. This is to avoid the 'empty room syndrome' by allowing a large number of initial users onto the platform.

Limelight was incorporated in early 2011. At that time, only Marc was working on the project. We would like to re-incorporate. We have not raised any money.

If you're not incorporated yet, please list the percent of the company you plan to give each founder, and anyone else you plan to give stock to. (This question is as much for you as us.)

We plan to re-incorporate with the following distribution:

Marc – 70%  
Matt – 30%

If we fund you, which of the founders will commit to working exclusively (no school, no other jobs) on this project for the next year?

Both. If Limelight were to require so much time that we were unable to continue our work on The Whoot, we would transition to working exclusively on Limelight.

For founders who can't, why not? What level of commitment are they willing to make?

Do any founders have other commitments between June and August 2012 inclusive?

No.

Do any founders have commitments in the future (e.g. finishing college, going to grad school), and if so what?

No.

Where do you live now, and where would the company be based after YC?

We live in Boston, MA right now. Location after YC is undecided. We would consider living in San Francisco or elsewhere in California.

Are any of the founders covered by noncompetes or intellectual property agreements that overlap with your project? Will any be working as employees or consultants for anyone else?

No.

Was any of your code written by someone who is not one of your founders? If so, how can you safely use it? (Open source is ok of course.)

No.

Are any of the following true? (a) You are the only founder. (b) You are a student who may return to school when the next term starts. (c) Half or more of your group can't move to the Bay Area. (d) One or more founders will keep their current jobs. (e) None of the founders are programmers.

(Answering yes doesn't disqualify you. It's just to remind us to check.)



If you had any other ideas you considered applying with, please list them. One may be something we've been waiting for. Often when we fund people it's to do something they list here and not in the main application.

Please tell us something surprising or amusing that one of you has discovered. (The answer need not be related to your project.)

Matt: Upon arriving in Ireland for study abroad, I was surprised to discover that the friendly man asking me "where's the crack?" was actually inquiring about the "craic" (party / good time), not asking me for drugs.

(Clicking on update doesn't submit your application; it just saves it to disk.)