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Tumblr | Union Square Ventures

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6-8 minutes

I have many locations on the internet where I can point to and say “that’s a piece of me.” There are a number of web services on which I output for my various modes of perception. The [music I listen to](#), [articles that interest me](#), [thoughts I share](#), [people I meet](#), [things I see](#), and [everything else](#) are all scattered around the web. Aggregating these pieces of myself from across the web into one location in a simple, clean lifestream should be easy.

Furthermore, using many different web services to express myself online is not common usage; this is fringe behavior at best. Culling choice images, quotes, ideas, pages, video, and such from both one’s own life and from the internet should not involve registering for as many web services as the number of media formats one consumes. There is something broken about the way I express myself online when every time I want to post something I have to ask myself: “What tools should I use to best express myself? Does this image belong on Flickr on my blog (or both)? Should I Twitter this thought or does it require a full-fledged blog post to articulate well?” It would be far more ideal to just post a piece of media to express myself without worrying about the overhead of how I should post it, what title I should use, where does it fit the context of the data around it, etc...

A blog is not an appropriate solution to these problems. I’m sure it works for some people that have gotten used to the overhead involved in blogging. But, in the past 18 months I have been blogging, I’ve been surprised by how cumbersome writing a post can be. Expressing yourself on the internet should be simpler. The tightly defined conventions and formality involved in maintaining and posting to a blog often get in the way of raw expression.

Considering these problems of personal expression online, Union Square Ventures is excited to announce our latest investment: [Tumblr](#). Tumblr is the easiest way to express yourself online. The form of expression on Tumblr is called a tumblelog, which (as [defined by Wikipedia](#)) is “a variation of a blog that favors short-form, mixed-media posts.” Tumblelogging exists to express a more ethereal identity. Sometimes a simple image or a snippet of video I find online can say much more about my current opinion, mood, or self-identity than any number of text paragraphs. Unlike other places to express yourself online, the atomic element at Tumblr is not one medium. At Flickr the atomic element is the image, at YouTube the atomic element is the video. By contrast, at Tumblr the atomic element is whatever works best for you now. Really into a Feist song right now? Can’t stop watching the video of a dramatic chipmunk? Want to rebut a NY Times Op-Ed? Just toss it up on Tumblr. And all types of media are handled correctly and presented elegantly, because your personal expression is a representation of you, so it should look good.

That last point about “looking good” is not trivial. Personal expression online should be simple, and, more importantly, it should be beautiful. We hear from Etsy sellers all the time that they use Etsy instead of a competitors because Etsy is beautiful, and they want to display their artwork on a site that has respect for aesthetics. The same is true of personal expression on Tumblr, Tumblr is beautiful, so it’s easy to make your random thoughts look good.

To clarify what I mean by “beautiful,” it’s not beautiful in a way that is distracting (like many beautiful, yet complicated, flash interfaces). Often times interfaces on web services are considered beautiful because they’re interesting and fun to play with (information visualization novelties like “tag clouds”), but these interface are not well-designed for simplicity. By contrast, the beauty in Tumblr is in its simplicity. Tumblr is well-designed because you don’t feel like there is an interface you’re working with at all... the interface melts away, and you simply get things done quickly, without error, and with gorgeous results.

Self-expression means different things to different people, so Tumblr is flexible to all those definitions. I’ve seen many interesting use cases for Tumblr over the past few months: Steve Rubel uses Tumblr to [aggregate his shards of web presence into a single lifestream](#). Steve Ruble has a blog, and uses Tumblr to supplement his blogging. [Jake Jarvis](#) aggregates many of this services through Tumblr too, but Jake doesn’t have a blog in addition. Tumblr is [his blog replacement](#). Some Tumblr paggers look [like photo](#)

[blogs](#). Others are a [mash of everything imaginable](#). I like the idea that Tumblr is what people make of it, and so I appreciate the wide range of use cases.

Since the announcement that Union Square Ventures has invested in Tumblr, I've been reading the articles and posts written on the subject and want to address one question I've seen a couple of times:

Q: Are Tumblr and Twitter competitive investments?

A: We don't think so. As you can read in [our post on investing in Twitter](#), we see Twitter as a communication platform. Or, to be more specific, a mobile communication platform. Many of the design decisions at Twitter (particularly the decision to limit posts to 140 characters) are made to enhance the mobile experience. There are people who consume Twitter entirely from their mobile phone who have never even visited Twitter.com in a browser. By contrast, Tumblr strives to be the easiest place to express yourself online, to create your web presence simply and beautifully. In the designing the best service to tackle their respective missions, both Twitter and Tumblr have become services that enable short-form expression. That's why many people see Tumblr and Twitter as competitive services. But, this comparison is superficial and does not grasp the goals of each service. If Twitter succeeds in fulfilling its mobile communications goals, all the problems that Tumblr addresses will still exist; and vice-versa for Tumblr. So, in our opinion, these two investments are not competitive.

[Fred](#) and [I](#) have been tumblelogging aggregated streams of our web presence, which you can follow. We are delighted to be working with David Karp, the Founder and CEO of Tumblr. And, we are excited to be investing along side Spark Capital, John Borthwick, Albert Wenger, Fred Seibert, and Jakob Lodwick. We eagerly anticipate Tumblr's latest release on November 1st.