

# Kevin Systrom

## Co-Founder of Instagram

Conor O'Neill

18300645

The rise of Kevin Systrom, a Boston native who would go on to found the most popular app in the world. Born in 1983, Systrom was raised in a wealthy Boston suburb by the name of Holliston. Not too far from my own home in Brookline, Massachusetts. Systrom attended Middlesex Highschool, where he was introduced to Computer Programming and Photography. He spent a lot of his spare time playing video games, and even developed a few of his own levels to his favorite game, Doom 2 (2). Systrom quickly found love for Computer Science and applied early to Stanford University. He planned to take Computer Science but decided to switch majors to management science and engineering. His first taste of startup came when he was selected as one of twelve students to take part in the Mayfield Fellows Program in Stanford, giving him in-depth training and experience in high-tech entrepreneurship (3). While in his Sophomore year, Mark Zuckerberg actually tried to recruit him to work at Facebook. Systrom declined as he wanted to live out the rest of his time in college, which was one of the best decisions of his life. During his junior year, Kevin spent the year abroad in Florence to study Photography (1). It was in Florence where Systrom stumbled upon the aesthetic that would define Instagram in the early days. Systrom even built a photo sharing site for his fraternity brothers, stemming from his longtime love for photography (1).

After graduating from Stanford in 2006, Systrom joined Google and worked on many of its products, including G-Mail, Google Calendar, Docs and Spreadsheets. However, his time at Google was short lived after he left to join a social travel recommendation startup called Nextstop (4). Around the same time, Systrom began developing his own app, called

*Burbn*, named after his favorite Liquor (1). The app featured location-based networking and photo sharing. Still in the early stages of development, Systrom received \$500,000 seed funding from Baseline Ventures and Andreessen Horowitz. Soon after, he hired Mike Krieger, a fellow Stanford graduate, as co-founder, and both began to work on *Burbn* (1). After recalling their studies in the Mayfield Fellows Program, they realized *Burbn* contained too many features and decided to have their main focus be photo-sharing. But the real “a-ha moment” came when Systrom and his now-wife, Nicole, were enjoying a holiday on the beach in Mexico. The couple were walking along the beach one day, snapping pictures of the view, and after Nicole’s unwillingness to post any of the pictures because “they didn’t look good enough”, Systrom came up with the idea to apply filters to the photos (5). Systrom sat down and developed a filter, the first one called X-Pro II, is still in the app today (1). Systrom and Krieger officially changed the name and in October of 2010, Instagram was born.

In its first 24 hours after launching, Instagram had 25,000 downloads, crashing its servers. In its first month, Instagram had over 1 million users, and nine months later, that number was up to 7 million (6). In April of 2012, just 17 months after the launch, Instagram was sold to Facebook for \$1 billion (7). Systrom netted \$400 million from the deal, as he owned 40% of Instagram going into the deal (8). However, Systrom was still head of Instagram and continued to improve the sharing, geo-tagging and filter features. He brought on former Yahoo Vice President James Everingham as well as Kevin Weil, who formerly headed product development at Twitter, as high executives in Instagram (9). The photo-sharing app took off with more than 40 billions pictures shared and 500 million active users by June, 2016 (5)(10). Despite the success of Instagram, there were reportedly growing tensions with Zuckerberg over the “direction of the product”. In September of 2018, Systrom and Krieger abruptly announced their resignation from CEO and CTO, respectively (1).

These days, Systrom is worth an estimated \$1.8 billion, and enjoys spending time cycling, playing golf and traveling (1). He also takes time to help people set up their own instagram accounts, like he did in 2016 when he visited the Vatican to personally help Pope Francis create an account! Today, Instagram is one of the most used apps in the world, with 37% of U.S adults using the app and roughly 1 billion active users to date (6). However, Instagram is not the end for Systrom and Kieger, the two are currently working on a project amid the corona-virus outbreak which estimates the rate of transmission in each U.S state. Additionally, among the ongoing saga surrounding Tik Tok, the company has reportedly approached Systrom about taking charge, as the position has been vacant since August (1). Doing so would put Systrom in direct competition with Zuckerberg once again... Is there a future for Systrom in Tik Tok and could he make a comeback into the world of social media?

## References

1. <https://www.businessinsider.com/kevin-systrom-instagram-ceo-life-rise-2018-9?r=US&IR=T#soon-after-systrom-brought-on-mike-krieger-as-a-cofounder-krieger-also-graduated-from-stanford-just-two-years-behind-systrom-before-joining-systrom-krieger-was-working-on-his-own-app-called-meebo-11>
2. <https://www.cnbc.com/2015/07/31/searching-for-zuckerbergs-inside-a-start-up-summer-camp.html>
3. <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/from-stanford-to-startup-entire-talk/>
4. <https://fortune.com/2014/10/10/how-kevin-systrom-got-started/>
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/oct/02/instagram-kevin-systrom-interview-working-on-time-travel>
6. <https://about.instagram.com/blog>
7. <https://www.webcitation.org/6CeW3OlQO?url=http://finance.fortune.cnn.com/2012/04/09/breaking-facebook-buying-instagram-for-1-billion/>
8. <https://www.wired.com/2012/04/facebook-buys-instagram/>
9. <https://www.vox.com/2017/1/23/14205686/instagram-product-launch-feature-kevin-systrom-weil>
10. <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-36584511>