

A Good Place: Periscope Magic

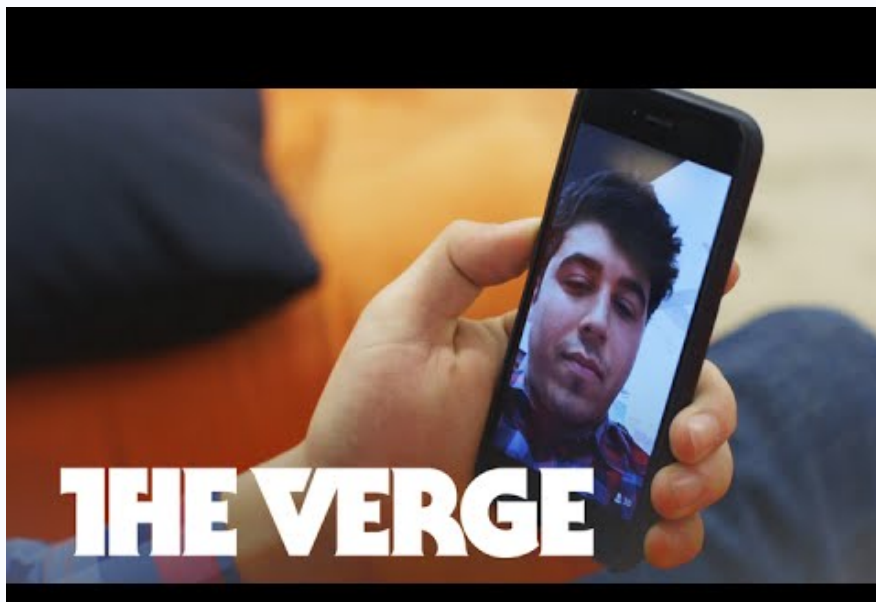
By David Blue

One livestreaming app has always been a fascinating, generally positive, and all around beautiful place.

In April, *The Outline* - one of my favorite Web Sites ever - closed its virtual doors. I should be more sad about this, but since before they even launched, they never responded to a single one of my emails. I sent them words of encouragement, admiration, spelling and pronoun corrections, and even a few pitches. Some of them were pretty good ideas, but I never once heard back. I pitched this very piece, in fact, for their series called "A Good Place," which began with the tag "the internet is too much, but this place is just right." In general, it sought the more wholesome, "positive" bits of The Web and detailed the histories of - and some pseudotherapeutic uses for - its often-quaint subjects. In my experience, I have not encountered anything more appropriate and yet *mainstream* for this supposition than Periscope, the live streaming app which Twitter bought before its independent launch that's quietly taken a place which could only be its very own.

TAKING A SHOWER/TAKING A SHIT EMBED

Through this service, I have watched - and watched with - people from all over the world and met apparently lifelong friends. I've spoken to users in their first 3 weeks trying to learn English and laughed with many more who couldn't understand each other whatsoever. I've streamed out hundreds of hours of live improv piano and had conversations with folks lasting late into the night on just about everything. I have observed Martin Shkreli's pungent ideas come out of him in real time and popped into live interviews with celebrities at the beautiful, surreal Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance. Periscope is embedded more deeply in society than one would think, considering how little it's mentioned in media.



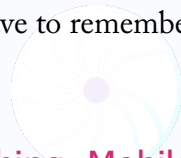
In February 2014, Kayvon Beykpour and Joe Bernstein founded Periscope with a seed round from angel investors "including Adobe executive Scott Belsky." A year later, Twitter bought it for some \$50-100 million (not even *Business Insider* knows for sure.) The app was briefly in direct competition with Meerkat - the since-extinct arguably originating service in the space.

By building a dead-simple broadcasting interface that piggybacks on Twitter's interest graph for identity, communication, and distribution, Meerkat made the first mobile livestreaming app that "just works."

Meerkat was an important rung in the ladder, but it ultimately died at the hands of Periscope due to its lack of a stream archive. "The surprise emergence of Meerkat as a social phenomenon this year has been accompanied by a frequent complaint: the links are usually dead by the time you click them," reported Casey Newton for *The Verge*.

For everything it got right, Meerkat still looks like an app built in eight weeks — which it was. Periscope has been in development for more than a year, and the app arrives showing nice attention to detail.

Periscope, by contrast, maintains an archive of past broadcasts for a significant period and allows users to save broadcasts locally on their phones. We have to remember how much has changed in the past five years in mobile terms. Dan Frommer in *Quartz*:



What has changed? Almost everything. Mobile phones are faster and more powerful, with large screens capable of displaying beautiful, high-definition video. Mobile networks—where LTE service is available, at least—can now easily handle high-quality streams in both directions. Data service is frequently affordable.



In 2015-2016, I worked afternoons (3-11PM) at a grocery store gas station in a moderately-sized shopping center on the South side of Columbia, Missouri. After work, I'd sit in my old Jaguar parked in front of the laundromat (for the WiFi) chainsmoking cigarettes on Periscope, talking about anything. I found my only real following, ever there. Friends like [Juanita](#) and [Nicole](#) were made. [Ashers](#) bought me a pack of cigarettes once (thank you!)

When I write about social services, I usually take some discerning care in my notes to document supporting instances *in the wild* demonstrating and supporting my arguments, but in just considering such a process in Periscope's case, I realized that I am 95% sure I have never had what I would call a *negative experience* on Periscope – as either viewer or broadcaster, which makes any prior consideration of experiences *far* less necessary. I maintain that I could play a game of stream hopping across the “live-only” offering in the map view for a twenty-minute period, noting down the URL to each stream as I went, paying no more mind to the actual live content of each than would be required to know when to move on, and come away with a list containing entirely-wholesome, additive videos, peppered with a handful *I* would consider *actually uplifting*. Last night, I happened to open the app accidentally (I've kept it on my first iOS home screen page for as long as I can remember in an effort to remind myself to use it more, which I'll come back to in a moment,) and immediately found