

## Y Combinator Funding Application Winter 2012

Application deadline: 8 pm PST on October 10, 2011.

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:

buss

Company name:

Tourious

Company url, if any:

<http://tourioushq.com>

Phone number(s):

3522002877 4128676418 4806036773

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

<http://steven-j39ft.posterous.com/private/fCkiFcxHHo>

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

buss djblaze joshleong

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

buss djblaze joshleong

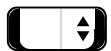
What is your company going to make?

It's TripAdvisor meets github meets choose your own adventure. We are crowdsourcing walking tour creation in cities. Users can build, share, fork, rate, and follow tours (from their phones). At any given point in a city, the user will be in the middle of, or at least near, many different walking tours. Users will be encouraged to branch out of their tour if they're bored, or just hungry.

We want to help people experience a city like a local and avoid the tourist traps, without spending hours researching hundreds of places and building an itinerary themselves.

The data we collect about real-world user behavior will be interesting to mine. We will eventually be able to use data about where people actually go, which tours get completed, and use 3rd party APIs like Google places and foursquare, to build and recommend better tours.

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). 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.

buss; Steven Buss; 25; 2010, University of Florida, B.S. Computer Science, minor in Math; [steven.buss@gmail.com](mailto:steven.buss@gmail.com); <http://stevenbuss.com/>; <http://github.com/sbuss/>; [steven.buss](https://www.linkedin.com/in/stevenbuss); [@sbuss](https://twitter.com/sbuss); Amazon SDE1.

djblaze; Devin Blais; 26; 2008, Carnegie Mellon University, B.S. Information Systems, double major in Human Computer Interaction / M.S. Human Computer Interaction; [devinblais@gmail.com](mailto:devinblais@gmail.com); <http://devinblais.com>; <http://github.com/devinblais/>; [devinblais](https://www.linkedin.com/in/devinblais); [@DevinBlais](https://twitter.com/DevinBlais); Amazon SDE2 (contractor) & HTC SDE

joshleong; Josh Leong; 25; 2008, University of Texas, B.B.A. Management Information Systems & Computer Science; [josh.leong@gmail.com](mailto:josh.leong@gmail.com); [www.atomicdesignkitchen.com](http://www.atomicdesignkitchen.com); <http://github.com/joshleong/>; [josh.leong](https://www.linkedin.com/in/joshleong); [@joshleong](https://twitter.com/joshleong); Microsoft User Experience Designer

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

Steven – In college I built an autonomous robot that chased after soccer balls using embedded C and a bluetooth link to a desktop running MATLAB for image processing. I machined custom hardware and soldered (often under a microscope) most of the boards.

Devin – I completely changed the way most 3rd party merchants visualize, manage and explore their sales data on Amazon by building an interactive data visualization library in JavaScript from the ground up (by myself). The library is now being integrated into various teams across Amazon who need a fun and interactive way to display important chronologically-based data.

Josh – Working on the core visual and motion design team, I was responsible for redesigning the visual and interactive experience of the upcoming version of Excel.

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

Steven came up with a scheme to artificially raise his girlfriend's quality score with her employer, using a flaw in their quality control process. His girlfriend recently started working for a medical transcription company. She is required to maintain a 99% accuracy rate, which is determined by random audits of old documents and submissions of new documents to be reviewed immediately. Soon after starting work, she was told she was submitting too many documents for review. In order to fix this, she only submitted transcripts with which she had the most trouble. Obviously, this dropped her accuracy rate below 99%. After discussing the problem with Steven, he brought up the fact that because she's required to submit her worst transcripts for review, the quality calculation isn't a true random sample, and can thus be manipulated. He figured out that she can simply average the documents that have been reviewed, find the necessary additional quality needed to bring up the total average, and submit just enough correct transcripts until the average passes the required threshold. After several weeks, there have been no more complaints from her boss.

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 have not worked together on a project before Tourious.

We have, however, been working together for several weeks now, and we're all getting along really well, so we don't have any concerns about being able to work together successfully. Everyone has been kicking ass.

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

Steven met Devin through a mutual friend who he met at a Reddit board game night in Seattle about a year ago and have been friends ever since. Recently, Steven pitched the idea for Tourious to Devin over drinks at their favorite local bar, and Devin was immediately taken by the idea. We've spent all of our free time for the past few weeks working together on the idea.

Devin and Josh have been friends since meeting through a mutual friend six months ago. Being impressed both with Josh's programming and, more importantly, design skills, Devin brought him onto the project after an informal discussion where they realized they were both trying to build a similar system independently.

Steven met Josh about three weeks ago when Devin introduced them and Josh was brought onto the project.

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?

We picked this idea because all of the founders have gone to a foreign city and, despite having looked hard for things to do before arrival, didn't know what to do once they got there.

We have never developed in the travel space before, but we all love to travel. All three founders have been programming for over a decade, and we all have experience launching and running websites.

We know people need what we're making because we need it. We're scratching our own itch, and have met many other people with the same problem. It is frustrating, not to mention time consuming, to check wikipedia, yelp, tripadvisor, guidebooks, etc., only to be overwhelmed with irrelevant information for mediocre places. If you lurk on a city subreddit for a couple weeks, you'll see many people asking the same question: "I'm visiting for x days, what should I do?" We want to make that question easier to answer.

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)?

The idea of city tours, that the user can fork, created by people who actually live in the city, available on any phone, is new.

Currently people have to either: build their own tours by researching for countless hours and hoping they picked the right things to see, find a tour guide and spend a bunch of money for an inauthentic experience, or amble about a city hoping to find something cool.

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

We have no direct competitors since nobody is doing walking tours, but the following are all close: TripAdvisor, Gowalla, Wikitravel, Yelp!, Google. We fear Gowalla most, since they've just recently re-launched with a new interface and features, and already have a great community. Gowalla is the only company we've found that's beginning to encroach on this space. They do have city tours, however they aren't organized logically, are hard to sort through, and are mostly tourist traps.

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

People don't want to spend time planning a trip. Our competitors focus on independent points of interest, which presents too many options and requires too much effort; we link these points together to match how people actually travel. Traveling is best done by visiting a series of places on a great route, not by visiting independent points.

Our closest competitor, Gowalla, has a lot of features that detract from the actual experience of being in a new place. They want you to check in, collect digital items with you, make a playlist, how long could you of while? (We realized you can't tie to their phones. They want you to stay in their application. We want to get you somewhere and get out of the way.)

We will make money in several ways:

- \* Paid advertisements from local businesses appearing along the route users follow (and we can even track if users physically go to the business!).
- \* Using APIs from companies like ThinkNear.com, which promotes businesses at certain times of the day, depending on when they need demand, from which we would take a referral fee.
- \* Professionally managed walking tours, like a segway tour, which a tour company has paid to list. (This might detract from the image of "made by locals" that we're trying to project, so we probably wouldn't do this.)
- \* Referral fees from hotel/flight booking websites (think hipmunk's vices map combined with tour routes)
- \* Sponsored routes (Tom Douglas wrote a book recently that is about walking tours in Seattle that go to famous sights and --shock!-- his restaurants. We can do the same thing for other business owners.)
- \* \$20 city packs, when traveling internationally since you won't want to pay the crazy international data charges.

The tourism industry is huge, grossing over \$100 billion annually in the US alone. Based on the millions of potential users, getting above \$50mm of gross revenue after 3 to 5 years is not unreasonable. Our biggest competitor, GoWalla, has raised over \$10mm in the last three years, and other competitors like Yelp! are valued at over \$200mm.

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?

2 weeks, ~1000 lines of Ruby on Rails & JS

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 have a functioning Alpha that was written in two weeks. We are hoping to launch a closed Beta at Startup School

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

<http://tourioushq.com/yc>

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?

Yelp grew by throwing parties for "elite" members -- those who wrote many high-quality reviews for the site. We can do the same for our own elite members, who would also be featured on vic.tourioushq.com sub domain.

We can promote on travel blogs and other niche sites like eater.com. We will let users share routes via twitter and facebook. We can watch twitter for keywords (travel, tripadvisor sucks, yelp...) and respond with a suggestion to use our service, though this is in danger of being seen as spam. We can also send out stickers to 'featured' places along popular routes that merchants can put in their windows.

We can overcome the chicken-and-egg problem by offering points and gift cards (and badges, or t-shirts) to the first 1000 people to create a walking tour in a city. We can also just seed the initial routes ourselves.

If you're already incorporated, when were you? Who are the shareholders and what percent does each own? If you've had funding, how much, at what valuation(s)?



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.)

1/3 each

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?

All of us

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

Do any founders have other commitments between January and March 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 all live in Seattle. We will all permanently relocate to the Bay Area.

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.)

Nothing other than OSS or APIs.

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.)

no

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.

Version control for news. After moving from print to digital media, there is no longer a hard record of news. All of us have had the experience of sending an article to a friend, only to come back later and see that it's changed. This is unacceptable in our society, and we want to create a watchdog service that monitors all published news articles for unannounced changes, and alerts subscribers.

Simple way to do A/B testing. Submit different URLs to test and create a basic task(s) for users. We then send users (filter by the demographic you want) to one of your URLs to try and complete the task and aggregate data to show which performed better. We could also create a system to create basic digital paper prototypes to then test those with users. A corporate edition would be available that integrates with your website and lets you do A/B testing with small areas on your website, i.e. buttons position, color, etc.

Translation game. Users can learn a language by translating sentences, and getting points for each word that matches what another user translated. For example, given the Chinese sentence “wo hen e”, someone might translate it as “I am hungry”, and another user would translate it as “I am very hungry.” Points would be assigned based on number of matching words and the most accurate translation would percolate to the top.

Track sources of pollution on a map. China leads the world in cancer deaths. These cancers are largely due to pollution. Nothing is being done about the pollution due to corruption and a desire for economic progress. The citizens of China need to have a way of holding companies accountable for the huge public health problems they are causing.

We could go on for days.

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

The astronomical number of people that pull up pornographic images on their kindle.

update

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