

# The Chronicle

## Duke alum launches app to showcase artists' work

By Margot Tuchler | April 10, 2013

Phil Haus, Trinity '08, is a founding team member of a new social media app that may give Twitter and Instagram a run for their money.

Pheed, a Los Angeles-based company that initially launched online last October, seeks to streamline several networks that young media consumers already use, such as Twitter, Instagram, SoundCloud and Vine, said Pheed Communications Director Chrysta Olson. The app garnered a million subscribers in its first 30 days of operation and spent six weeks atop Apple's free apps chart.

Haus, who serves as community director for Pheed, noted that whereas Twitter was founded in a Blackberry-dominated area that was conducive to text content, more advanced smartphones have created a demand for more interactive content, which Pheed can provide.

"As digital becomes the playing ground, we need some platform that can kind of take people into that new world," Haus said. "Now the digital experience is very visual."

Haus became involved in the Pheed project after having spent time in Los Angeles working in the music and entertainment industries. There he met current Chief Cultural Officer Tony DeNiro, a friend of internet entrepreneur O.D. Kobo, Pheed founder and CEO, and the business took shape. Haus noted that he is "not a tech person"—rather, his contribution to Pheed comes from his ability to accumulate followers that coalesce into the network's community.

During his time at Duke as a sociology major and a theater minor, Haus also served for three years as the recruitment chair for Sigma Nu fraternity, which gave him experience with networking.

"This is a big game of rush—reaching mass amounts of people and introducing them to something great that you want them to be a part of," Haus said. "So that's definitely something that stuck with me. I would definitely say the process of introducing Pheed to the world was a lot like rush."

The team noted that entertainers did not have a way to monetize their content through social media, and thus the Pheed business model was born.

Pheed operates without advertisements and allows users to sign up for free. The business operates by letting users—such as high school bands or professional musicians like David Guetta or Miley Cyrus, both of whom are Pheed users—charge followers whatever they want to view content, either by placing a monthly pay-wall to their entire channel, or by setting up a live performance via pay-per-view on an otherwise free channel., Olson said.

“Platforms like Twitter and Instagram have multi-billion dollar valuations but the content creators that make those platforms so interesting don’t necessarily have a way to capitalize off of that,” Olson said. “On the other side these platforms then have to figure out a way to make money.”

It is not just celebrities that can tap into this model, Haus said.

“If someone wants to do a broadcast, whether they be a high school band that wants to raise money for an album or Miley Cyrus who wants to go through Pheed and say [for example] ‘Next Friday at 3 o’clock I’m going to sing two songs from my living room,’ she can make seven figures in 15 minutes,” Haus said. “We’re expanding the audience potentials by connecting them through this digital platform.”

Olson noted that the platform can also benefit fundraising efforts—charities can set up accounts for themselves, or organizations and individuals can donate their profits to any charity.

Social media expert Brian Uzzi, Richard L. Thomas distinguished professor of leadership at the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University, said he believes the potential to make money is a unique feature that is likely fueling Pheed’s business. He noted, however, that he believes this feature will likely appeal more to niche artists who gain dedicated followings on other networks, as opposed to already established celebrities.

“People already making enough money in their day jobs, like celebrities, aren’t going to care about making a few cents off of Pheed,” Uzzi said.

He noted that those types of media users would be better served reaching a large, heterogeneous population through Twitter and Instagram.

The process of developing the network was achieved from the ground up, by talking to members of the entertainment industry and growing the community independently, Haus said.

“We started going around L.A. meeting with different people—celebrities, producers and pacemakers—who had audiences to see what they thought about the idea and what they thought was missing [from social media],” Haus said. “Everybody was frustrated there was no real way to control content as well as monetize it.”

Pheed has seen significant growth over the past few months, especially with users between the ages of 15 and 25, and experienced a membership boom in December, Olson noted. This was around the time that Instagram faced criticism for its temporary terms of use change, an alteration that gave Instagram the right to sell users’ content without their consent. A large contingent then migrated to Pheed, which lets users maintain ownership of their content.

A feature of the app allows users to include a copyright watermark with their name on content they upload, Olson said. This feature is one of Pheed’s main draws, Uzzi said.

“People who are uploading really unique things or artistic creations or great insights will always be able to claim those contributions as their own,” Uzzi said. “That’s very valuable and unique.”

<http://www.dukechronicle.com/articles/2013/04/10/duke-alum-launches-app-showcase-artists-work>

Uzzi added that Pheed appears to draw users who may be disillusioned with more mainstream social media, noting that Pheed's homepage features an edgy photo of a heavily tattooed man with short, punky hair, allowing it to appeal to "people on the fringe," he said.

The process of giving talented artists a new way to share their content has been a rewarding part of the growth of Pheed, Haus said.

"People that can harness [their] great capabilities that aren't limited by just photo or just audio," Haus said. "They have an even playing ground where content is king. That is a bit cool."

*This article has been updated to note the Pheed paywall and pay-per-view system that users can set up for their material.*