

# VIEW FROM THE TOP

TREETOP VENTURES NEWSLETTER

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## Old Dog Learns New Tricks

By William Fisher



There is hope ... even for an old dog like me. My kids (and even my grand kids) are loaded with iPods, iPhones, iPads and everything else technology savvy that starts with a vowel. My oldest grandson Jackson (7) laughs at me when he tries to figure out why I can't manage to help him get Super Mario to a higher level. It's not that I am technology challenged; it is just that I am a little slow to change. Eventual ... but slow.

That's why when I hear about new mobile payment schemes or new technology like tweets or mobile marketing, it basically falls on my deaf ears until it gets a little more mainstream. For me, using my mobile phone for anything more than to call people (or get calls) is a stretch. I can text; however, if you get one from me, treat it like a very rare piece of art. There aren't many of them.

So, you can imagine my surprise when a local technology executive named Craig Page reached out to me and asked if I could help his team figure out how to take their start-up mobile marketing company to the next level. I guess I would have been more surprised if someone from Mayo called to ask my input on how to approach brain surgery; however, not much.

It seems that Craig and his partners (Spike Stevens and Mike Corbisiero) have developed a platform that is unique because it offers a quick and affordable way for any merchant to add mobile to their marketing tool kit. The merchant is completely in charge, and the offers, deals, and information they create can be made instantly available to over 99% of the 280 million mobile phones in the U.S. They were referred to me by a former business acquaintance who had worked with Craig at FDC; they wondered if I would be willing to help them analyze their options as it relates to rolling out the product beyond their beta cities. [www.themenetwork.net](http://www.themenetwork.net)

My team and I have spent quite a bit of time lately helping Craig and his team analyze their options. It was an interesting process whereby their knowledge (how to cut code for Droid and IOS, how to utilize SMS short codes, how to enable merchants to create offers fast and cost effectively) was a match with my team's sweet spot (how to create strong distribution agreements, how to price your offering, how to build your long term capital needs model, how to set up the company for a capital raise, how to put together an investor presentation in order to raise capital, etc.). It has been a very successful combination and will result in a very strong company that has a product that most merchants will want to add to their arsenal.

For my local merchant friends, check their product out. It is inexpensive (approximately \$100 a month), effective and allows you to utilize your current marketing efforts and make them more effective. For you ultimate consumers with the 'i' fetish, download the free app. <http://itunes.com/apps/MeNetwork>. You will like it. This will be one of those

continued ...

## PayPal Founders: Innovation Is Dead

By Nicole Perloth, Forbes

Max Levchin and Peter Thiel are not ones to mince words: "Innovation in this country is somewhere between dire straits and dead," Levchin said at TechCrunch's Disrupt conference today.

PayPal's co-founders are collaborating on a book with Russian grand chessmaster Garry Kasparov called *The Blueprint* about what they see as a slow decline of innovation in the U.S.

"If you look outside the computer and the internet, there has been 40 years of stagnation," said Thiel, who pointed to one of his favorite examples: transportation. "We are no longer moving faster," Thiel noted. Transportation speeds, which accelerated across history, peaked with the debut of the Concord in 1976. One decade after 9/11, Thiel says, we are back to the travel speeds of the 1960s.

This is hardly a new theme for the Facebook financier. When FORBES profiled Thiel last February, he blamed the world's problems on what he calls "stalled technological innovation." What a wonderful world this would be, he mused, if we could time travel back to the late 1950s and '60s and realize predictions of science fiction that never materialized: ubiquitous space travel and colonization, desalinization, reforestation of deserts, and underwater cities.

Taking the stage today, Thiel reiterated that philosophy but took specific aim at the energy industry. "Clean tech," he said. "Is increasingly a large disaster. People in Silicon Valley aren't even talking about it anymore."

On many levels, this is true. Just look at the number of VCs who beat the cleantech drum for years, only to spend the majority of their time today buying up late shares of Facebook, Groupon and Twitter. But there is also a certain hypocrisy at work here. Thiel stopped building

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## Old Dog Learns New Tricks (*continued*)

companies that we look back on that was created in the Midwest and capable to turning heads in the technology hot spots around the country.

And here is the best part. I am capable of using my mobile phone now for something besides making a rare phone call. I can text their code (63638) with keywords (think Omaha wine or Omaha pizza) and get deals from local merchants. Now, for most of you who are reading this and can text a math problem to your friend with one hand, this isn't a big deal. But for me ... huge. And, after seeing their Apple app on Craig's iPad, I actually think I am going to get my wife an iPad. After all, she is in charge of shopping in our household (including dining) and an early adopter (grand kids help her more than they help me).

Sadly, I am not in management at home.



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## How the hottest startups got their names

*By Sarah Kessler, Mashable*

There are no rules to naming a startup. And most entrepreneurs do assume that the name they choose will change before their businesses really start to gain momentum.

Consequently, it doesn't shock us that some of our favorite startups were sired by picking names out of hats, by throwing out odd proper nouns that might be cheap domain names and by haphazardly removing vowels.

Ever wonder what a "Twitter" is, or who the "Hipmunk" is? We've asked nine startups to share the story behind their names.

### 1. Twitter

The name Twitter was picked out of a hat. A small group of employees from Odeo, the San Francisco podcasting startup where Twitter initially began, had a brainstorming session. They were trying to come up with names that fit with the theme of a mobile phone buzzing an update in your pocket.

After narrowing down the options (which included Jitter and Twitter), they wrote them down, put them in a hat, and let fate decide. Fate decided on Twitter (because clearly asking someone if they saw your latest "jeep" is just weird).

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## Long walk to innovation

*By Nicole Perloth, Forbes*

SOUTH AFRICA likes to think of itself as punching above its weight, in business as in everything else. It styles itself as the S in the emerging world's BRICS club, despite being a fraction of the size of the four original members. It is also home to a striking number of global companies. In the Boston Consulting Group's list of 40 fast-growing "African champions" with global ambitions, South Africa led with 18 companies followed by Egypt with seven and Morocco with six.

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### Employee Spotlight

## Eric Nipp

Having worked for a decade as a CPA with a global accounting firm and an attorney at law with an Omaha-based law firm, Eric next joined ACI Worldwide, Inc. (NASDAQ:ACIW), where for 11 years he developed and directed ACI's purchasing, real estate leasing, facilities, and risk-management functions. From ACI, Eric was recruited by EHC Financial Services, L.L.C. in Vancouver, WA (a skilled nursing operator with 3,000 employees and 50 facilities), where he directed EHC's litigation-defense, IT, real estate leasing, and facilities functions. Eric holds a B.A. in accounting from Gonzaga University and a J.D. (Cum Laude) from the Creighton School of Law.

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