

An Interview With Kakul Srivastava, General Manager of Yahoo!'s Flickr

Hello, my name is Lon Safko, co-author of *The Social Media Bible*, published by John Wiley & Sons, the most comprehensive book ever written on the subject of Social Media. Today we are here with Kakul Srivastava, the General Manager for *Yahoo's Flickr*, and we are going to be talking today about Yahoo, Flickr, photo-sharing, Social Media and all kinds of other things that are cool.

So, Kakul, welcome! Thank you for being here.



KS: Thank you for having me. This is great, this is really fun.

LS: This is great. Can you please tell the listeners a little bit about who you are, what your background is, what you do at Yahoo?

KS: Sure, sure. I am the General Manager of *Flickr*. I have been part of the team since the acquisition happened, and when I joined the team, we were at about 300,000 registered users. Today we are over 30 million users for *Flickr*. We have close to 3 billion page-feeds on the monthly basis, and about 60 million unique [01:09.2] on a monthly basis.

LS: Wow!

KS: We have grown quite a bit. It's been an incredible ride.

LS: I cannot imagine trying to keep up with that type of growth.

KS: It has been incredible!

LS: Well, could you tell our listeners, (I mean this is amazing and everyone's going to want to know what this is all about if you have never done photo sharing) can you summarize what *Flickr* is?

KS: Sure. *Flickr*, at its core, is two things. First and foremost, it is a photo-sharing site, making it easier for people to share what is happening with their lives with their friends, their families, or potentially with the world. And it is really this last part, which is the second part of what *Flickr* is, which it really is a Social Media site.

When you think about tradition media businesses, you think about places where you find out about news and information; *Flickr* fundamentally is that. At the scale that we are today, we have 3 million photos uploaded on a daily basis and you can only imagine the sound of 3 million photos shutters snapping across the world on any given day. We are really capturing what is happening in the world and in people's lives for a very, very personal perspective.

So we see our vision as being the "eyes" of the world and really making that possible.

LS: That is absolutely so true! It really is the "Eyes of the World". When you are looking at 3 million photographs that people have taken the time to pick out, probably the best photographs they have taken; and

because they want to share those, those are really the best photographs on the planet. And you are accumulating 3 million of them a day!

KS: Yes, it is absolutely amazing! And it is actually quite humbling to be part of the team that makes that possible.

LS: Wow, I would be proud of that! If someone wanted to actually start doing some photo-sharing, is it difficult, is it expensive; what is the process

KS: You know, that is a great question. It actually is really easy. I think to start with, you have to take a photo; and luckily, for us today you can take a photo with almost any device out there. Camera phones, which everyone has; there is an average of three camera phones for every human on the planet that are being used now. That's a really incredible number! And almost all of them have photo-sharing features in them, not to mention the huge adoption of digital cameras, as well, across the board.

So it is really easy to start taking photos, and then sharing them is really the next step. That happens through the pervasiveness of internet connections, not only through traditional devices like the PC, but again through phones and through other devices as well. So it is actually pretty easy to get started. And then, for Flickr itself for example, if you snap a shot with your camera-phone you just have to send it to an email address here with *Flickr* and it will be uploaded to your *Flickr* page. Then all of your friends and family can see what you are doing at that given moment.

LS: And that's one of the things that I find really exciting in *Flickr*. With this digital convergence and Social Media, you can just pull out your cell phone, take a picture, and hit a button! The next thing you know it has automatically posted to Flickr and the entire world has access to it.

KS: Yes, it is amazing and, of course, there is the mobile aspect of it, which is a really pervasive platform, where you can just take it from any camera-phone and share it immediately. Beyond that we are integrated with almost all the leading desktop photo applications, so you can go through any of their applications that people like to use and upload to *Flickr* from there. And, of course probably the dominate way of sharing through *Flickr* is through our website and through our uploading application. You can just drag-and-drop a bunch of photos, or video for that matter, and share it with your friends and family.

LS: And that's one of the things I love, too. That is the way you cooperate with everybody else. For example on both my websites, *The Social Media Bible* as well as *Lon Safko.com*, I have a little bit of a widget (or a plug-in) where my homepage continuously pulls my photographs from *Flickr* and displays them on each of my web pages. And this is so my followers can actually see all of my *Flickr* photographs right there on the page, where I have posted them somewhere else.

KS: Absolutely! In addition, as you have probably seen in the research for you book, that is a key component of Social Media. No only can anyone really take Social Media and share Social Media, but there are so many different ways of consuming Social Media. You do not have to go to one website in particular, but the Social Media can actually syndicate, and the content is available very openly.

LS: And that is exciting, that it is completely transparent across all of these different platforms.

KS: Exactly!

LS: Can you give me an example of what some individuals (or even businesses but let's start with individuals) are actually doing with the photographs? What's the purpose of them uploading?

KS: You know, that is such a simple question, but there are so many incredible, incredible things that people are doing with photo sharing.

LS: Really.

KS: It starts with something very basic which is that this is something in my life and I want to share it. And if you think about in the early days of photography what people were really trying to do is hold on to a memory. This is an important day; this is a birthday, for example and I am going to take photos and share those with people.

With digital the ease of sharing, as well as the ease of capturing these moments have really expanded those uses from beyond just, "I want to hold onto this particular moment" to "I want to document everything that's meaningful to me in my life." That can be everything from, "Here is an interesting piece of graffiti I saw at the bus stop I was waiting in," or "Oh my God, there is a protest going on down the street from my office. I can capture it!" or "I'm in Galveston, Texas right now and there is a hurricane, and I think the world might want to see this."

So it is really, really amazing how people are capturing and sharing what they are seeing. But what is interesting about a site like *Flickr* (which is not just about this content, but the way communities form around this content) is that people start interacting with this content in a very interesting way. So you almost have this second-order community-effect starting to happen. For example one of the biggest groups on *Flickr* is something called "Squared-Circle"; and the premise of the group is really simple, which is people take a photograph of something circular and they crop it to a square and they upload it to this particular group.

LS: (Laughter)

KS: But what this group has been able to do is (it is 25,000 people or more) they have been able to create this incredible shared/collaborative work that is absolutely stunning and beautiful to look at. It is like nothing else!

There is another similar collaboration going on in looking at photographs of stick figures that are in dangerous situations. There is an entire group dedicated to recording what is in somebody's bag at a particular given time. So you just have to see all of these really incredible collaborative projects start to happen, and one of the most interesting ones is happening at *Flickr* right now. It is called the "*Flickr Common*" where libraries like the Smithsonian or the Library of Congress or the British Tate Gallery are uploading some of their archival photography collections and allowing *Flickr* members to go through this content and find meaning in the content; which would not have been able to be found were it not in the hands of so many people.

It has been just really incredible to see how much incredible meta-data and meaning our members have been able to find in some of this content. One of my favorites is this example of a photo of some dockworkers leaving the shipyard in the afternoon. One of the comments on the photo is by a *Flickr* member who says, "I

remember as a kid; we lived down the street from this shipyard and at night we would see the light of the welding torches.”

And that’s a really poignant moment that gives life to that photo in a way that particular photo, sitting in a library archive, never would. So, again, the kind of things that people are starting to do with photo sharing is really tremendous; everything from the most banal thing of, “Here’s what I had for my lunch today” to a deep and moving understanding of the world around us. It is very powerful!

LS: Those are incredible examples! You are right, it really is like “slices” into human nature and society; cross-sections. Wow!

KS: It is, and it is incredible!

LS: And the Smithsonian! That’s is...I am fascinated by the Smithsonian. I have 18 of my inventions in the Smithsonian, and I just love going there and just being surrounded by all that history. And to be able to go online, I never even thought about it. What a wonderful archive, what a resource that would be! Oh geez, I am getting the chills! Thank you. (Laughter) This is great!

From the business...this book, primarily, is going to focus on the business aspects of Social Media. Can you think, off the top of your head, of any type of business applications that companies are using *Flickr* for?

KS: Oh absolutely! There are tons of ways! First of all, there is a whole conversation we can have about *Flickr* as a business, and we are a successful one, and we can talk about that. Separately there are a number of ways that businesses can use photo sharing to further their business goals.

One most obvious thing is photos; like any other media, would be a great way to share what it is that your business does and to help people understand the services that your business provides. Separately from that, photo sharing is actually a really great way to humanize your business. So one thing that *Flickr* does (and a lot of businesses are starting to do this) is actually use photography done by their employees to say, “Here’s what it takes to make this sauce, as it were; and “Here are our employees at play and here are our employees interacting with each other to provide the best service.” And that is really, really interesting, as well.

Flickr, like many other Social Media businesses, has an advertising aspect to our business, as well. Certainly, that is a robust and growing field.

LS: Wow, geez! That is such a great idea! What you just mentioned about humanizing the business is that Social Media, for the first time is creating this two-way communication and taking the veil off of corporations and companies and getting you inside and opening up this line of communication; and if you can, see the employees at work, or see happy customers using your product or your service.

KS: Oh, it’s incredible! And one of the reasons that businesses come to *Flickr* is to actually engage with some of their customers who are using their product. If you search for pretty much any brand name on *Flickr*, you will find tens, of not 100’s of groups about that particular product or brand name where *Flickr* members are talking about the product or the brand and why it is interesting or helpful, or not helpful to them. And that’s an incredible way to have this two-way communication with your customers.

LS: So *Flickr* is actually enabling around photo sharing to create trusted networks.

KS: That's exactly it.

LS: Wow, wow! You see, this is so much deeper than I would even think. When you talk to most people, especially the novice, they will say, "Okay, well photo sharing; I upload some photos and I tell grandma to go look at them", but this is so much more robust than that. Great stories!

You mentioned earlier that *Flickr*, as a business itself, has been successful. What can you share with us about the company itself?

KS: Well, I did share some of the growth numbers over time, and I think in the same way that overall member and usage growth has grown, our revenues have grown according; and it has actually been very successful. Actually, I cannot share any numbers, specifically, but as a business, we have been successful.

We basically have four tenants of our business. The first is a Premium Account, or Pro Account as they call it, which is a subscription service and of course, it is a "tried and true" and loved model in the media world.

The second aspect is advertising; also a known and loved model in traditional media, and has very, very interesting implications with the Social Media side of the world with targeting and with these rich two-way conversations that we were talking about.

The third here, and this is something more related to photo sharing than the Social Media aspect of it, which is that there are a lot of services that people want to have around their photos; whether it is standard prints or books or canvass prints of their photos, or canvass prints of other people's photos. There is a lot of incredible art that is being shared, so there is a rich business there.

And then the fourth (and this is probably the most recent from a *Flickr* perspective) is a licensing business. And you may have heard of our partnership that we recently announced with *Getty Images*. That is going to allow *Flickr* members to actually monetize their images by licensing them.

LS: Really! Now I was not familiar with that. How does this play into the new *Creative Commons Act*?

KS: So there are two different things. One is the *Commons Project*, which we were talking about earlier, which is a way for institutions like the Library of Congress, to show their images on *Flickr*. And that is actually a completely separate initiative than (in the industry what is know as) *Creative Commons* which is a way to allow users to apply licenses to their images governing usage of how their content can be used. And our partnership with *Getty Images* lives right along side our incredibly strong support for *the Creative Commons*, as well.

It is just another opportunity for people to choose how they want to license their image.

LS: And I love to hear that because the internet has been around for 13 or so years, almost 14 years. And in the beginning it was a free-for-all, it was the Wild West. If you put something up there, just about anybody could steal it and use it anyway they wanted. Since the *Creative Commons* and *Getty Images* licensing, it sounds like we are trying to get a little bit fairer about it. If it is available for public domain, then it's so noted.

And if it is for licenses, that's also noted, and I think that levels the playing field and lets everybody know where they stand.

KS: Yes, that's exactly right. That's it! It is driving towards that transparency that we were saying is so critical to Social Media.

LS: That's incredible. I am really glad to hear that *Flickr* really takes that seriously. That's great because that will make me feel a lot more comfortable if I wanted to upload some photographs that I think could be stolen, for example.

KS: I think you have that right, we do take this very seriously and it is absolutely core to our values at *Flickr*.

LS: That is so cool. That is absolutely really excellent. Is there anything else that you can tell me about *Yahoo*, *Flickr*, and your time there, what your customers are doing?

KS: You know it is just a great, great field to be in. One of the things that we love about being here at *Flickr*, as part of Yahoo, is we really are at the epicenter of some of the most interesting things that are happening. With Social on the internet, Yahoo has a deep commitment to the power of people and empowering people to do great things. You've probably heard a lot about *Yahoo*'s open strategy, and this is what Social Media is really a key part of. So we are very excited about that. We spent a lot of time talking about photo sharing, but from our perspective, video is a key part of that as well. We have launched video sharing on *Flickr* this year and it is going really well.

So I think overall, we are just really excited to be one of the leaders in Social Media and we are looking forward to being part of the innovation that this industry is really bringing about.

LS: And that is great that you mention video sharing. When I interviewed Stephanie Bryant, the author of *Video Blogging for Dummies*, she had mentioned that where she actually got started was in *Yahoo Groups*. And you had the earliest and by far the largest group on video sharing and video blogging than anyone on the net.

KS: Actually, I was part of that group! Yeah, it is an incredible group! And incredible group of people.

LS: Yes, she speaks very highly of it and she says that's what actually motivated her to become a video blogger and eventually to write the book.

KS: Yes.

LS: Wow! I do not even know what to say. Where, if our listeners want to find out more information about *Flickr* and get involved and set up an account and start doing this, where would they go?

KS: You know, the best place to get started is www.flickr.com.

LS: (Laughter)

KS: www.flickr.com!

LS: That is pretty simple.

KS: (Laughter) Nice an easy!

LS: That is F-L-I-C-K-R!

KS: Yep, that's it!

LS: That is totally great. Thank you. I really, really want to thank you for being here, Kakul Srivastava....

KS:yes! (Laughter) Thank you, Lon.

This has been Lon Safko, the co-author of *The Social Media Bible*. Be sure to check out our other valuable Social Media tactics, tools and strategies that can be found in *The Social Media Bible* book and its companion website, www.thesocialmediabible.com.

For more information about me, Lon Safko, please go visit my website at www.lonsafko.com.

And thank you so very much, Kakul Srivastava, for being here today and telling us all those great things about *Flickr*.

KS: Yes. (Laughter) Thank you so much, Lon. Take care.