

Feature Writing

2013 KSPA REGIONAL CONTEST

Assignment

You are to write a 300- to 350-word story on two former AAHS students who developed an app that may make them millionaires in their 20s.

The writer should determine which information is relevant and important to the story. Students may write in pencil or pen. Students may use dictionary, thesaurus, and AP Stylebooks. The use of personal listening devices, recording devices, cell phones or computers is prohibited.

Background

Snapturtle is an online service created by Ad Astra graduates Woodrow Wilson and William McKinley. They started Snapturtle two years ago in 2011.

Today, more than 60 million photos or messages are sent each day through Snapturtle.

Snapturtle began at the University of Kansas, where Wilson and McKinley first met as fraternity brothers. They were Sigma Iota Pi fraternity members. Wilson presented a prototype of Snapturtle in spring 2011 to one of his classes. His class and the professor said it was impractical and silly.

Wilson and McKinley shared an updated version for the iPhone with about 20 friends in September 2011. A few weeks later, they started seeing an influx of new users, paired with unusual spikes in activity, peaking between 8 a.m. and 3 p.m.

The activity was centered around Ad Astra High School. Wilson's mother had told his cousin, who was a student at the school, about the app, which then spread throughout the school.

Other high school students in Kansas picked it up. The number of daily active users climbed from 3,000 to 30,000 in a month in early

Description

You are a member of Ad Astra High School's newspaper staff. Your editor has assigned you to write a feature story using the information provided.

School Info

Name: Ad Astra High School
Location: Aspera, Kansas
Mascot: Box Turtles
Enrollment: 850 (grades 9-12)
School Colors: Green & Gold
Yearbook: The Honeybee
Newspaper: The Star

Contest Info

This is a carry-in contest.

Please attach your assigned contest number in the upper right-hand corner on the back of your photo.

Do not put your name on the entry. If you do, your entry will be disqualified.

Students are not to request help or advice from anyone other than the KSPA Executive Director. All work must be that of the contestant.



2012. Wilson took a leave from the University of Kansas last June, McKinley quit his job at a law firm and the pair raised about \$100,000 and moved to Kansas City to work on the application full time.

The founders have now raised \$13.5 million in financing for the company. The app itself doesn't make money, but the promise of its profitability has attracted investors. Wall Street analysts say the company, if sold today, would bring about \$70 million.

Images sent through Snapturtle self-destruct seconds after they are opened.

Surveys show young Facebook users are becoming acutely aware of the permanence of the content shared through the Web.

Critics claim that Snapturtle is used by people to do bad things, such as sexting – sending potentially pornographic items.

Snapturtle, according to Nielsen statistics,

attracted 3.4 million users in December, more than twice as many as in November.

Mark Zuckerberg, the Facebook chief executive, met with Wilson and McKinley in December. Facebook then started its Poke app to compete with Snapturtle.

Snapturtle can't see or store copies of content, but the service still allows nimble-fingered users to capture screenshots of photos. Each time a screenshot of a Snapturtle is taken, the sender is alerted that the image has been captured. There have also been reports of loopholes and hacks that let people save videos and screenshots. "Nothing ever goes away on the Internet," Mr. Wilson acknowledged.

The overwhelming majority of Snapturtle's users are aged 13 to 25, so the application has provoked concerns from parents.

Quotes

Woodrow Wilson, 22, AAHS class of 2009

"It's almost like a digital version of passing notes in class . . . not that we want any Box Turtles out there to pass notes in class. Please use our app after class, kids, not during class."

"It became clear to us how awful social media is. There is real value in sharing moments that don't live forever."

"We are not advertising ourselves as a secure platform. It's a communication platform. It's not our job to police the world or Snapturtle of jerks."

"We really didn't know each other in high school. I mean, I knew who Billy McKinley was . . . we were in the Computer Science club together. But we didn't pal around at all. Then we pledged the SIP house at KU, and the rest is history."

William McKinley, 21, AAHS class of 2010

“You can’t build a business off sexting. It’s such a specific-use case. This is about much more than that.”

The demand comes from real life. People want something that is more lightweight than a message and less permanent.”

“We didn’t build this app to make a boatload of money, but if we get rich, I won’t have a problem with that. Do you?”

“We know that kids today are finally getting the message that building a permanent social media presence of party pics isn’t a good idea if they every really want to get a good job, or even get into a good college. This is a way to have fun without leaving a permanent stain on your record.”

“We’re aware that people are taking screenshots of Snapturtle posts. Those are rare instances, and the vast majority of people understand the value of the service. We’re working on a more secure way to share, though.”

Madeleine Albright, a senior at Ad Astra

“When I first heard about Snapturtle from my sister at KU, I thought it was dumb But then I began to realize that it was a much more intimate way to communicate with friends. The emotional weight of the content is heavier because messages are direct and personal. Plus, the time limits make people more comfortable.”

“People are very self-aware when it comes to their Facebook profiles. All the content is very manicured and curated, the best possible portrait of yourself.”