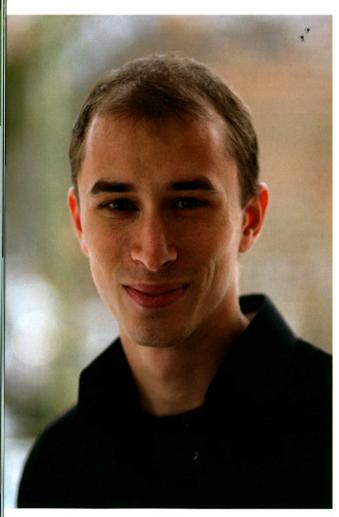# the bobcat behind
imgur

BY JULIANNE MOBILIAN   PHOTOS BY KEVIN CRAMER

Meet the man behind the memes. OU alumnus Alan Schaaf has created another website to distract you from your studies, Imgur.com.

> "I actually worked on the site in class. I'd bring my laptop and act like I'd be taking notes, when really I was just working on the site."
> Alan Schaaf
> Creator of Imgur

"NOT TODAY, BITCH!" captions a photo of a zebra violently kicking a lion to avoid becoming its prey. Click. A young woman grins at the camera while she cradles her stomach, showing off her T-shirt that says, "Baby loading." Click. An image of Hipster Ariel from Disney's The Little Mermaid captioned "I left the sea because it was too mainstream." Click. Condescending Willy Wonka cocks his head in a meme as he asks, "300 people liked your bikini picture on Facebook? I bet it's because you have a lovely personality."

Thanks to Imgur.com, and its Ohio University alumnus creator, optimal viewing for its host of images is easy, efficient and enjoyable. Since 24-year-old Alan Schaaf created the Imgur site in 2008 as a side project for Reddit.com, he has revolutionized the way people view humorous pictures on the web.

"Imgur is a website for images, but it is different from other image or photo sites," Schaaf says. "Flickr.com, Photobucket.com, and Facebook.com, those are for sharing your personal pictures, whereas Imgur, for the most part, is for sharing viral, funny content."

Schaaf independently created Imgur during his junior year at OU. He majored in computer science at OU and graduated with his degree in 2008. It was difficult, though, to balance his classes with the website, he says.

"It was really hard," Schaaf says. "I actually worked on the site in my classes, but most of my profs knew what I was doing."

Schaaf's love for the Internet—specifically Reddit.com—prompted his project. Reddit is a site that gets its content from user-generated posts or links. Members of the site can vote for these as either "up" or "down." The most popular submissions end up on the front page of Reddit. In addition, Reddit has multiple tabs to browse through, such as "Politics," "Atheism," "WTF," "TodayILearned," "AdviceAnimals," "Mov-ies," "Funny," "Science," and its most popular tab, "Pics." According to Alexa.com – a site that tracks various websites' statistics – Reddit is the 52nd most visited website in the United States.

"Oh, I love Reddit! I'm a big fan, definitely," Schaaf says of the website.

Without being asked, Schaaf created Imgur for the Reddit website because he wanted users to more easily navigate through images.

He is also a huge fan of the popular Rage Comics, which are cartoons most popular among the Reddit fan base. A lot of the funny pictures, particularly humorous memes, get trafficked fast.

"The featured galleries on Imgur get trafficked the most. All of the featured galleries have over a hundred thousand views. The top gallery gets over a million, sometimes even a billion views," says Schaaf .

As for Imgur's name, it is a combination of a few things.

"It was 50 domains long when I first created it, which of course was too long," he says. "I checked to see which site names were available, and "Imgur" was one of them. It's like a play on the words "Your" and "Image." It combined the two names, which is what Imgur is all about."

Schaaf's website is stylized as "Imgur," which causes some people to pronounce it as "Em-gurr," but its proper pronunciation is "Imager."

"I didn't really think it would become as famous as it did," remarks Schaaf. "I knew it was beginning to take off when I started seeing people I didn't know—like mutual friends of a friend through Facebook or Twitter—use it."

Despite the tremendous workload of dealing with school projects as well as the Imgur website, Schaaf was able to have a positive college experience.

"I really loved OU," he says. "In fact, I still lived in Athens a year after I graduated."

As a student, Schaaf lived in Ryors Hall, Scott Quad, and finally on Schafer Street.

He most enjoyed his time as a member of the campus' radio station, ACRN.

"It was a lot of fun," Schaaf says. "I was the web director there and also I was a DJ."

Now, Schaaf lives in California and works full-time on Imgur, but he still visits OU when he has the chance.

"I'm on the board of directors at Flare Code, and they have meetings sometimes at OU, so I do get to visit every now and then," he said.

Now that he is out of school and can dedicate his time to Imgur, the site's popularity is increasingly growing. According to Alexa.com, Imgur is now the 33rd most visited site in the United States, with more members joining every day. It is also starting to be used more outside of the Reddit community, appearing on popular social networking websites such as Facebook and Twitter. Imgur won TechCrunch.com's "Best Bootstrapped Startup" award as the site hasn't accepted any outside money or investors to help its take off.

As for Imgur's future, Schaaf is ambitious and optimistic about what may come for the site.

"I've had some offers from those willing to buy it, but I'm not quite ready to sell it," he says.

BY THE NUMBERS:

1 BILLION page views monthly

15 MILLION image uploads monthly

28 BILLION image views monthly

31 RANK IN U.S most visited site

70 GLOBAL RANK most visited site

'11 CRUNCHIE AWARD best bootstrapped startup

For more info:

Alan did two "Ask Me Anything's" on Reddit, where he answered the questions of Reddit users about Imgur. The links to these AMA's are:

http://www.reddit.com/r/IAmA/comments/9tlwi/im_the_imgur_guy_ama/

http://www.reddit.com/r/IAmA/comments/eicjf/im_the_imgur_guy_ama_part_two/

The sound of E.T. walking was made by someone squishing her hands in Jello.

Cat's urine glows under a black light.