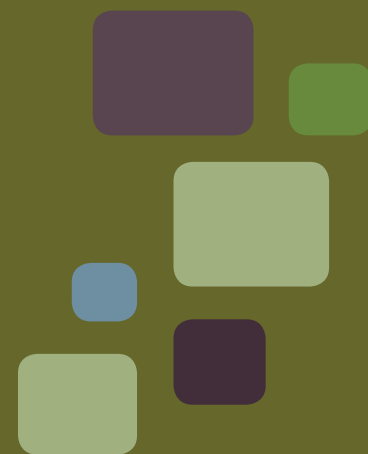


# Social Media Mavens:

## A Look at the Top 10 Technology Venture Capitalists on the Web



### The 10 Most Influential Technology Venture Capitalists Online (Overall Score)

Overall Rank	Venture Capitalist	Position / Company
1	Fred Wilson	Principal, Union Square Ventures
2	Mark Suster	General Partner, GRP Partners
3	Brad Feld	Managing Director, Foundry Group
4	Chris Dixon	Co-founder, Founder Collective
5	Bill Gurley	General Partner, Benchmark Capital
6	Josh Kopelman	Managing Director, First Round Capital
7	Paul Graham	Partner, Y Combinator
8	Dave McClure	Founding General Partner, 500 Startups
9	Charlie O'Donnell	Partner, Brooklyn Bridge Ventures
10	David Hornik	General Partner, August Capital

In the world of venture capital, influence and reach are two critical drivers of success that are increasingly being fueled through social media tools and other online channels. While online media's impact on business and marketing is already a familiar story, the growing popularity and evolution of online communications and social networking represents a significant shift in the narrative. Consider, for example, that as recently as late 2011, almost 80 percent of active Internet users in the United States utilized social media sites, including blogs, dedicating close to a quarter of their time online to visiting and using them (See Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> With the advent of the smartphone, mobile applications have extended the reach and power of social media even further.

For venture capitalists, online channels have become important tools of the trade. Whether blogging or tweeting, podcasting or networking through professional communities on LinkedIn, the Web provides powerful opportunities for venture capitalists to interact with entrepreneurs and the world. Along the way, they can share content, ideas, insights, and experience — all of which gives them visibility, attracts followers, and raises awareness of their personal brand.

1. Nielsen, "State of the Media: The Social Media Report," Q3 2011.

What these online channels do especially well is enable their users to build influence and expand reach throughout the venture capital and entrepreneur communities. Using a variety of highly effective tactics that encourage interaction and engagement across multiple mediums, the venture capitalists cited throughout this report have been extremely successful at both strengthening their individual brands and these communities.

## BEHIND THE ANALYSIS

For this report, OpenView Venture Partners examined more than 30 of what it deemed to be the top technology-focused venture capital firms in the United States and compiled a list of the partners at each of these firms.<sup>2</sup> The initial list of venture capitalists was narrowed to only include those who maintained an active personally branded blog or who had a substantial professional online presence outside of their company’s website. Doing so reduced the list to 28 venture capitalists.

We then surveyed the subscribers to our weekly newsletter — distributed to more than 11,000 CEOs, entrepreneurs, and startup professionals — to learn what sources they used to find information on funding opportunities and investors for their companies, with respondents selecting their preferred online tools from a list of commonly cited mediums. The results are listed in Figure 2.

Most of these mediums were ultimately excluded because of their relatively limited online presence (reducing their ability to extend influence), the small number of people willing to use them as regular sources of information, or their limited use by technology-focused venture capitalists. The three tools that remained — blogs, Twitter, and Quora — thus emerged as the most important for measuring venture capitalists’ online influence.

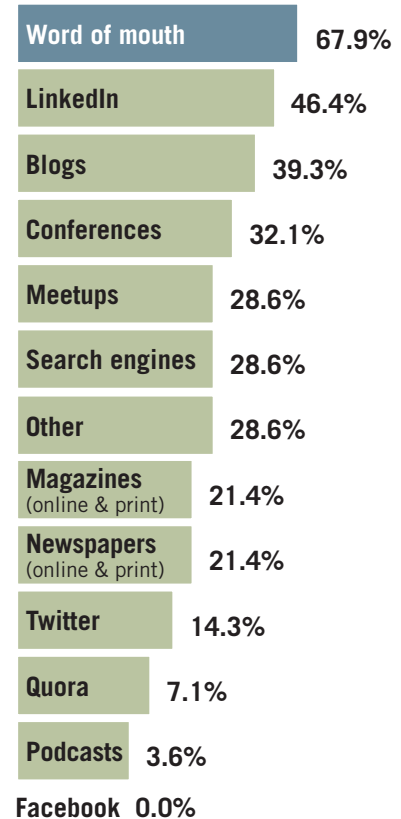
### Figure 1: Top 5 US Social Networks and Blogs

Total minutes (000s), Home and Work

Facebook: 53,457,258  
 Blogger: 723,793  
 Tumblr: 623,525  
 Twitter: 565,156  
 LinkedIn: 325,679

Source: Nielsen, Q3 2011

### Figure 2: Top Sources of Information on Investors



*“My use of blogging and social media serves as a test ground for technologies and ideas. I get to play with every tool that comes out, while also gaining hands-on experience with products that I may one day invest in. It also serves as an incubator for my ideas about the markets. I put ideas out and a debate ensues in the comments section allowing me to refine my thinking. If you were advising young entrepreneurs on their startups, you’d tell them to look for ways to ‘go direct’ to their customer base. In a sense, that’s exactly what blogging and social media allow today’s venture capitalist to do.”*


Mark Suster, General Partner, GRP Partners

2. OpenView partners were excluded from the list to prevent any unfair bias.

After researching the three tools to determine how to best measure their reach, impact, and efficiency,<sup>3</sup> OpenView established a series of parameters to measure these factors and determine their overall influence. (See figure 3).

To determine the 10 most influential venture capitalists online overall, the rankings for each of these mediums were then used to calculate an overall aggregate influence score. More specific details about the algorithms used to calculate scores for each medium, as well as for the overall rankings, are included in the appendix of this report on page 9.

**Figure 3: The Impact of Social Media Channels**

<b>Blogs<sup>4</sup></b>	<b>Reach</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Efficiency</b>
Total number of subscribers			
Interaction levels, as measured by comments to blog posts			
Number of overall comments			
Overall audience as measured by Alexa			
<b>Twitter</b>			
Online influence within the VC community, as measured by the Klout score			
Net followers			
Number of followers per tweet			
Number of times listed			
<b>Quora</b>			
Net followers			
Number of mentions			

## THE MOST INFLUENTIAL VENTURE CAPITALISTS ONLINE BY CHANNEL

A major driver propelling the widespread adoption of social media tools is the discipline and ingenuity of their users. The top online venture capitalist influencers stand out for their flexible and creative techniques that push the envelope to support branding and community-building efforts. This section of the report lists the top venture capitalist influencers on Twitter, personal blogs, and Quora, and highlights the techniques they're using to be successful with each.

3. Due to a lack of observed data, many of these factors had to be proxied for using other metrics that measure similar factors.

4. OpenView limited its focus to venture capitalists with their own self-branded websites.



*"In 2004, when I started blogging, I made the decision to fully embrace the idea of living my life in the open and communicating online with any entrepreneur who was interested in interacting with me. I had two goals: to help entrepreneurs and to deeply immerse myself in the technologies, products, and services I was investing in. I've loved it, and it just keeps getting better every day."*

Brad Feld, Managing Director, Foundry Group

## BLOGGING

### The 5 Most Influential Venture Capitalist Bloggers

Ranking	Venture Capitalist	Position / Company
1	Fred Wilson	Principal, Union Square Ventures
2	Mark Suster	General Partner, GRP Partners
3	Brad Feld	Managing Director, Foundry Group
4	Bill Gurley	General Partner, Benchmark Capital
5	Chris Dixon	Co-founder, Founder Collective

The blogosphere represents a vast online space that has grown into an important forum for broadcasting information. Blogging is also a particularly effective way for venture capitalists to share knowledge and experiences with the entrepreneur and venture capital communities, and to grow their online spheres of influence.

Given the number of public blogs — there were more than 180 million by the end of 2011<sup>5</sup> — it would be easy for any one contribution to disappear from view. The top venture capitalist bloggers recognize the importance of remaining visible, not only for themselves, but also for their readers who leave comments, and frequently create and seek out opportunities for interaction.

Blogging offers an unrivaled way for venture capitalists to engage with their community, as well as build their personal brands. Top-ranked venture capitalists actively participate in the blogging community, and across industry discussions and forums. Perhaps most importantly, they understand their target audiences and speak to them directly with their blog posts.

The most effective blogs tend to reflect many similar characteristics. Among possible approaches, they:

- Cross-promote their content, through referencing other related posts in the text
- Demonstrate start-up business acumen
- Connect on a personal and professional level
- Employ both long and short posts
- Publish content on a regular schedule
- Actively engage with readers and encourage engagement
- Foreshadow upcoming content
- Pursue experiential approaches to help entrepreneurs know what to expect
- Expand the boundaries of content by covering a wide range of topics
- Give readers many reasons to visit their blogs

5. <http://www.dazeinfo.com/2012/03/10/number-of-blogs-up-from-35-million-in-2006-to-181-million-by-the-end-of-2011/>

Top venture capitalist bloggers also recognize that layout matters almost as much as content. They give their blogs a unique personality and design (and generally maintain their blogs separate from their firm's website). They also pursue page layout strategies that encourage multi-page visits. Readers can usually expect to see a small but prominently displayed description that lets them know exactly what that blog covers, and the bloggers restrict their posts to these content areas.

### Blogging Best Practices in Action:

Here are some examples of the techniques the top five venture capitalist bloggers are using:

**Brad Feld** replies to posted comments within an hour, and promotes this fact to encourage interaction. This signals to his audience the importance they bring not only to his blog, but also to the community-oriented conversation his blog tries to foster.

**Fred Wilson** highlights his responses to comments in a contrasting color, while **Bill Gurley** does so using a blog author comment button. These practices reinforce that they consider the comments and their responses to them a valuable addition to their blogs' content.

**Chris Dixon**, **Brad Feld**, and **Mark Suster** regularly contribute guest blog posts to other prominent venture capital and entrepreneur-focused websites. In doing so, they leverage their knowledge and personal brand to new readers by increasing their visibility in the blogging community, industry discussions, and other venture capital forums.

**Brad Feld** dedicates one page on his blog to the marathons he has run, another to a book review, and a third to a special Groupon-like deal of the day, while **Fred Wilson** shares his music favorites with readers. All of these tactics offer a way to increase their approachability with readers on both a personal and professional level.

**Mark Suster** has blog reference pages that connect all of the posts he has written for his top themes, effectively creating a one-stop shop for his content. They are updated weekly and featured in his blog's navigation bar. **Fred Wilson** uses a table of contents for his MBA Monday series that is powered by Pandamian and automatically updated with every new post. This practice helps readers easily navigate his blog to find the content they are looking for.

In addition to his weekly MBA Mondays series, **Fred Wilson** publishes two bi-weekly series called Feature Friday and Fun Friday.

## TWITTER

### The 5 Most Influential Venture Capitalists on Twitter

Ranking	Venture Capitalist	Position / Company
1	Fred Wilson	Principal, Union Square Ventures
2	Dave McClure	Founding General Partner, 500 Startups
3	Paul Kedrosky	Managing Director, Kedrosky Capital
4	Mark Suster	General Partner, GRP Partners
5	Brad Feld	Managing Director, Foundry Group

Perhaps one of the best known and most prolific social media tools in the world, Twitter is a Web- and mobile-based social networking service that has been allowing users to communicate through 140-character tweets since its launch in 2006. In addition to having a growing and loyal overall following,<sup>6</sup> Twitter is one of the most widely known tools that individuals and companies use to obtain venture capital investor information.<sup>7</sup> Twitter tracks many statistics that can be used to gauge the online influence of its users. For example, it tracks the number of subscribers to a single user's feed, the volume of tweets being sent, the number of times a user is listed, as well as other statistics. Several companies like klout.com track additional statistics that can be used to estimate a user's reach and influence via this channel.

Just as quickly as this mobile online channel has moved up the rungs of the overall social networking ladder, many of its users have discovered ways to leverage its features to extend their following and build their personal brand. Savvy Twitter users don't just send one-off tweets at random, but rather take a more strategic approach by consistently tweeting on specific topics to make their Twitter streams predictable. They also use hash tags (#) to help categorize their tweets and make them easy to search.

Leading venture capitalists exploit these and other techniques to increase their following and drive engagement on other channels. They also interact with other top influencers to gain further exposure for their personal brands. Importantly, many adopt a conversational and personal style in their feeds, making them more interesting and approachable to entrepreneurs and other venture capitalists. Top venture capitalists also cross-promote their Twitter presence on their blogs and the other social media channels they use. To encourage interaction, they often list their Twitter handle on their business cards, and in their e-mail signatures and other social media profiles, actively encouraging individuals to reach out to them on Twitter.

Although playing the follow-to-be-followed game is a common pastime for many Twitter users, leading venture capitalists understand that doing so is unproductive. Instead, they engage with those who actually influence them and provide information, thus boosting not only their presence on Twitter, but their overall visibility online and in the entrepreneur and venture capital communities.



*"Social media is quickly becoming the most compelling form of communication in the world. Those venture capitalists looking to significantly increase their influence on the Web should adopt the techniques outlined throughout this report as industry best practices. Fail to do so, and it could mean getting left behind altogether."*

Brian Zimmerman, Managing Director, OpenView Venture Partners

**OpenView Partners** @OpenViewVenture  
 Venture Capital fund focusing on software and tech.  
 Boston, MA · <http://www.openviewpartners.com>

6,109 TWEETS    2,192 FOLLOWING    3,370 FOLLOWERS

Following [Profile Icon] View more Tweets →

**OpenView Partners** @OpenViewVenture  
 As of Feb 2012, @Twitter had registered 500 million accounts <http://twopcharts.com/twitter500million.php> #TwitterUsers

**OpenView Partners** @OpenViewVenture  
 Here's a mind-boggling #socialmedia stat: 14 new accounts are added to @Twitter every second <http://twopcharts.com/twitter500million.php>

6. See Figure 1, "Top 5 US Social Networks and Blogs."

7. See Figure 2, "Survey Results on Top Sources of Information on Investors."

## Twitter Best Practices in Action:

Here are some examples of the techniques the top five venture capitalists on Twitter are using:

**Fred Wilson** uses the hash tag #MBAMONDAYS to promote his MBA Mondays blog post series, a technique that builds predictability and makes his tweets and blog easily searchable. **Dave McClure** does the same thing to promote his Geeks on a Plane (#GOAP) and Geeks on a Bus (#GOAB) adventures.

**Mark Suster** and **Brad Feld** often use Twitter as a conversation tool rather than a content-sharing platform. During the first two weeks of December 2011, 72 percent of Suster's tweets included mentions (@Twitter Handle). Similarly, 42 percent of Feld's tweets during this time period also included mentions.

**Dave McClure** tweets about his speaking engagements and other opportunities to interact with him — an effective way to cross-promote and drive engagement.

Some venture capitalists like to get personal in their Twitter feeds, which helps make them more approachable to entrepreneurs. **Dave McClure**, for example, frequently tweets about his family, travels, and daily life.

**Paul Kedrosky** publishes a digest of his tweets to his blog every day, giving his blog readers the chance to see what he tweets about before following him.

## QUORA

### The 5 Most Influential Venture Capitalists Using Quora

Ranking	Venture Capitalist	Position / Company
1	Dave McClure	Founding General Partner, 500 Startups
2	Mark Suster	General Partner, GRP Partners
3	Brad Feld	Managing Director, Foundry Group
4	Charlie O'Donnell	Partner, Brooklyn Bridge Ventures
5	Ryan Spoon	Principal, Polaris Venture Partners

Quora is a user-created online Q&A forum that was established in 2009. Its hundreds of thousands of users are able to submit questions to Quora that anyone else in the community can answer.

It has become a popular tool among venture capitalists for demonstrating their expertise by answering questions posted on the site. Because its users collaborate on how it is organized, Quora offers opportunities to highlight particular topics or topic-related needs. Users can also cross-link their accounts on Quora to other social media sites such as Twitter.

Although only about one-third of the venture capitalists analyzed in this study actively participate on Quora,<sup>8</sup> it is a platform that top venture capital influencers use to increase their interaction with entrepreneurs. One of Quora's notable strengths is that it is a low-stakes environment where

8. Of the 28 venture capitalists examined in this study, nine actively used Quora. Active use is defined as having more than 10 answers and being active over the past three months. However, 25 of the venture capitalists examined in this study still maintain a Quora account.

participants are free to ask or answer all types of questions. Key success factors on Quora are providing timely responses that offer quality content. These also happen to be the same success factors that drive engagement and stimulate learning — important considerations given that some entrepreneurs experience their first contact with investors through Q&A sites such as Quora.

Many top venture capitalists also devote a significant amount of time to exploring ways to utilize the platforms of other Q&A sites such as sprouter.com to increase engagement in the entrepreneurial community.

### **Q&A Sites Best Practices in Action:**

Here are some examples of the techniques top venture capitalists are using on Quora and other popular Q&A sites:

**Charlie O'Donnell, Brad Feld, David Hornik and Mark Suster** use Quora and/or sprouter.com's Q&A platform to respond to questions from fellow entrepreneurs and investors. For entrepreneurs just getting started, Q&A sites offer comfortable venues for approaching investors for the first time.

Live video Q&A platforms such as Google+ Hangouts give venture capitalists and influencers like **Robert Scoble** an opportunity to engage with members of the community who live in different geographies. Live Q&A also gives a sense of immediacy and spontaneity.

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## **BUILDING BRAND AND COMMUNITY WITH ONLINE CHANNELS**

The major online media tools that the top venture capitalists use to increase their influence each have unique advantages. Leveraging those capabilities to drive community awareness and education as fundamental branding activities helps set Fred Wilson, Mark Suster, Brad Feld, and the other venture capitalists noted in this report apart from their peers. A second distinguishing feature is the recognition that cross-channel synergies offer important ways to expand reach and build influence. Many of the most insightful techniques are those that anticipate needs and link across content and channels.

Above all, the top venture capitalist online influencers highlighted in this report use social media as a communication platform and personal branding tool, not just a content broadcasting channel. They build their branding efforts around an understanding of the needs that motivate the entrepreneur and venture capital communities. Each online tool offers the means to address those needs in particular ways by creating, expanding, and enhancing the connective links that reflect the evolving dynamics of those communities. As the social media world continues to evolve and mature, the marketing strategies that top venture capitalist influencers use provide valuable lessons on how to ride the wave.

*An upcoming companion report will take a similar look at top venture capital firms online and the marketing strategies that help them stand out.*



## APPENDIX

To rank venture capital online influencers against one another in each online channel, OpenView used the following methodology:

### Twitter

An aggregate score was calculated for each venture capitalist using the following algorithm, and they were then ranked in ascending order:

$$\text{Tweeter Aggregate Score} = (\text{Klout Score} * 40\%) + (\text{Twitter Net Followers} * 10\%) + (\text{Number of Followers Per Tweet} * 10\%) + (\text{Number of Times Listed} * 40\%) + 2.0 \text{ Point Penalty for Low Tweet Volume} + 1.0 \text{ Point Penalty for Over a Week of Inactivity}$$

Notes:

- Due to the fact that fame can cause a person who uses Twitter sparingly to gain large followings, all venture capitalists with fewer than 100 tweets were penalized 2.0 aggregate score points.
- A 1.0 aggregate score penalty per week was applied to tweeters with at least one week of inactivity at the time of measurement.
- “Klout Score” is a 1-100 point index that measures online influence in terms of true reach, amplification, and network impact.
- “Net Twitter Followers” refers to a Twitter user’s followers minus the number of followers that the user follows.
- “Number of Times Listed” refers to the number of users that have categorized a given user into a targeted list of tweeters that they can follow in a separate feed. This is an important metric because it is a good proxy of the number of users that actually read an individual’s tweets.

### Blogging

An aggregate score was calculated for each venture capitalist using the following algorithm and they were then ranked in ascending order:

$$\text{Blogger Aggregate Score} = (\text{RSS Subscription Rank} * 60\%) + (\text{Comments Per a Blog Post Ranking} * 15\%) + (\text{Average Number of Blog Comments in Last 5 Months Ranking} * 15\%) + (\text{Alexa Ranking} * 10\%) + 2.0 \text{ Point Penalty for Unavailable Data} + 1.5 \text{ Point Penalty for Each Month Elapsed Since Last Blog Post}$$

Notes:

- Some venture capital bloggers do not allow comments. Each venture capitalist was assessed a 2.0 aggregate score penalty for not allowing comments on their blog, as this made it impossible to compare these individuals against the other bloggers in terms of reader engagement.
- A 1.5 aggregate score penalty was assessed for bloggers who posted less than once per month on average.

## Quora

An aggregate score was calculated for each venture capitalist using the following algorithm and they were then ranked in ascending order:

$$\text{Quora Online Presence Aggregate Score} = (70\% * \text{Net Followers}) + (30\% * \text{Number of Mentions})$$

Notes:

- Quora users with fewer than 10 answers or who had been inactive for at least three months at the time of measurement were excluded from these rankings.

## Aggregate Score

An aggregate score was calculated using the following algorithm and then sorted in ascending order to determine the final rankings:

$$\text{Online Influencer Aggregate Score} = (\text{Twitter Ranking} * 25 \text{ percent}) + (\text{Blog Ranking} * 66.7 \text{ percent}) + (\text{Quora Ranking} * 8.3 \text{ percent})$$

Notes:

- Although OpenView's partners were excluded from this list to avoid any unfair bias in the analysis, adding them into the ranking would not impact the overall rankings.
- The weights assigned to each online medium were based on a survey that OpenView conducted in late 2011 with 28 entrepreneurs (culled from 11,000 subscribers to the OpenView newsletter) to determine where individuals learn about potential investors and funding opportunities for their companies. The results from this survey are displayed in Figure 2 of the report.

## SOURCES

[www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)  
[www.klout.com](http://www.klout.com)  
[www.alex.com](http://www.alex.com)  
[www.compete.com](http://www.compete.com)  
[www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com)  
[www.google.com/reader](http://www.google.com/reader)



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