

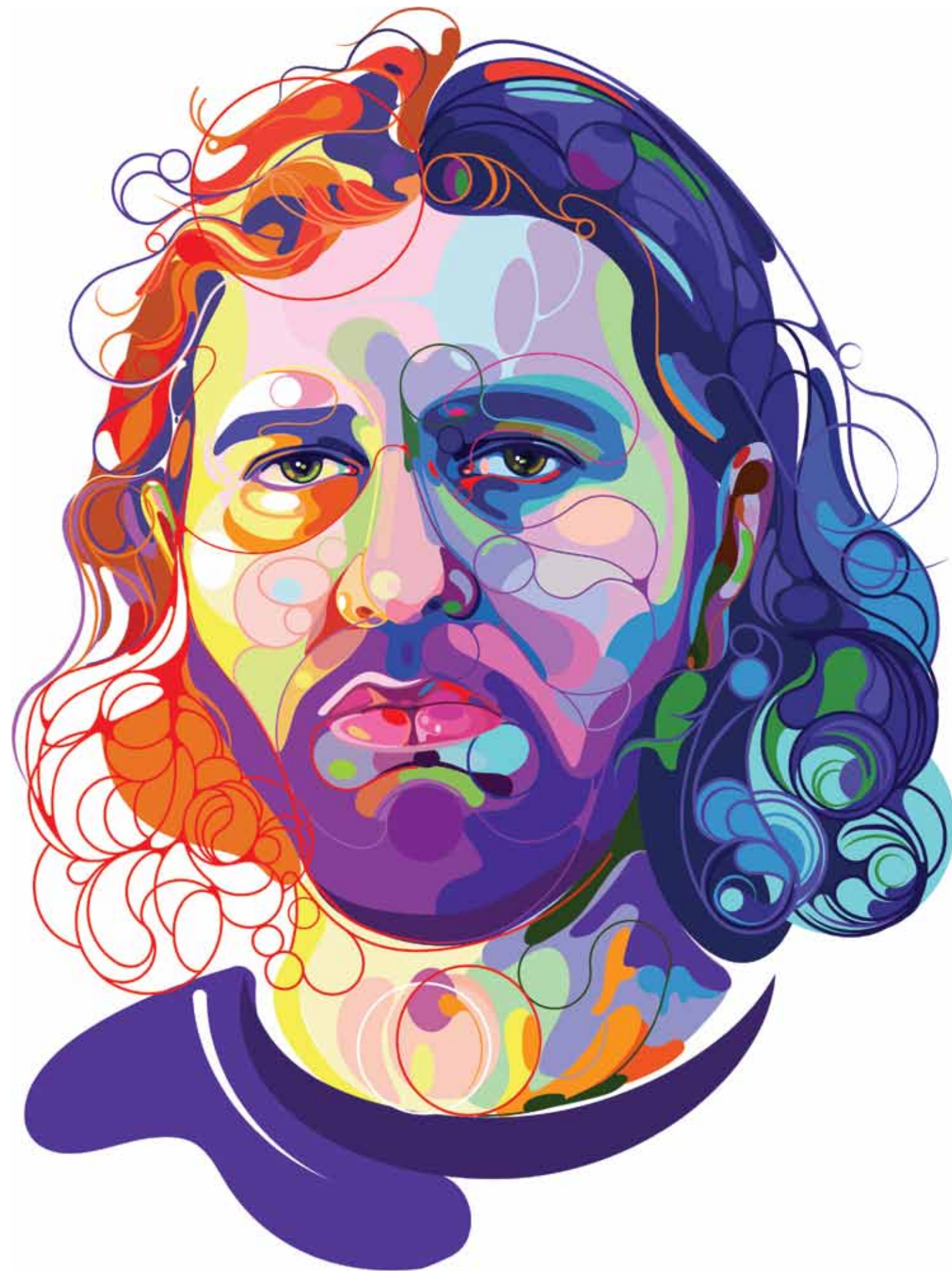
# UNDER HERO

The untold story of how Calgary's Garrett Camp changed the Internet, blew up the transportation industry and became the third-richest man in Canada—all while remaining virtually anonymous

BY STEPHEN M. BALDWIN



ILLUSTRATION BY M.ORE







# THERE'S NOTHING PARTICULARLY MEMORABLE ABOUT GARRETT CAMP

Like most computer savants in Silicon Valley, he seems allergic to the suit and tie. But he doesn't have a defining uniform either, like Mark Zuckerberg's grey T-shirt or Steve Jobs's black turtleneck. He's got a wide and genuine grin, but he doesn't exactly ooze charisma. There's the hair—long and curly—but that's not so rare in the world's tech capital. His personal website gives a hint of his low-key nature. It features a thumbnail-sized headshot on a dark-grey background, and just 13 words: *I'm an entrepreneur based in San Francisco. Founder @ Expa, Uber and StumbleUpon. @gmc.*

To that brief description, Camp—a 37-year-old from Calgary—could add third-richest Canadian on the planet (behind David Thomson and Galen Weston), with a net worth that *Forbes* pegs at \$6.2 billion (all currency in U.S. dollars). That's one-10th the valuation of Uber, the ride-sharing app that has spread to 402 cities and attracted upwards of \$12 billion in financing since Camp first came up with the idea back in 2008.

No doubt you know all about Uber and its loudmouth “brogrammer” of a CEO, Travis Kalanick. Everyone swears that the company—which allows users to hail a ride with two taps of a button—is either solving the world's transit woes or operating an illegal taxi service that lures workers into precarious employment.

But you've probably never even heard of Camp. Uber's chairman shrinks from public appearances (he gave a rare speech at an entrepreneurship forum in his hometown this past November) and steers clear of any discussion of his company's controversial business practices. “It's pretty simple,” he says during one of several phone interviews from San Francisco. “Uber is great. Uber is bringing efficiency to a market that wasn't efficient.” Beyond that, he won't say much. He's

really just more of an adviser to Uber, he insists. “I can talk about it generally,” he says, “but when you're on the board of a company, you don't have the daily exposure to these sorts of issues. I just don't think it's your place to comment on something unless you're well-informed.”

Truth be told, Camp has already moved past Uber—let Kalanick deal with the cease-and-desist orders from municipalities worldwide, the scores of lawsuits and cabbie protests, and passengers irate over surge pricing, not to mention the day-to-day headache of running a technology company with 2,000 employees, more than 1.1 million active independent-contractor drivers and huge ambitions that include developing its own driverless car.

Camp is a product guy. He loves hammering away at a problem until he finds just the right fix. Sure, he's been hailed by colleagues and investors as a visionary. But he emphasizes that any so-called revolutionary product goes through dozens of iterations first. “It seems visionary,” says Camp, “but really you were just strategically hacking away at something for a year.”

In this way, Camp has created not just one, but two paradigm-busting tech companies. And he seems confident—quietly, of course—that it won't be his last. So do the investors who've poured tens of millions into his latest venture.

“In general,” he says in his characteristic syllable-skipping pace, “people sort of remember me as a good system designer who worked on interesting products that ended up getting good traction. I think that's how people will remember me.”

Camp first fell in love with computers when he was about 10, when his uncle let him borrow his Macintosh Plus for the summer.

His parents were a fusion of technical and creative: His dad was a contractor and architect, his mom an artist and designer. They both worked for themselves, and the family dinner table—in a house in a middle-class Calgary neighbourhood—was constantly strewn with blueprints, paint samples and project plans. “I grew up in a little bit more of a self-driven environment,” he says. “It was part of the reason I became an entrepreneur.”

Young Camp was pragmatic: His ambition was to learn everything he could about computers and the burgeoning Internet. But when it came time to apply to university in 1995, he chose electrical engineering at the University of Calgary instead, since there were so few computer science opportunities in Canada at the time.

Camp went on to do his master's degree in software

engineering. His thesis was on information retrieval through collaborative interface design and evolutionary algorithms. In other words, combining technology with a tight-knit community to improve search results. When he and his friend Geoff Smith, along with two of Smith's co-workers, began batting around ideas for their own company, the notion of building a community-driven tool to help users find interesting web pages emerged as the obvious choice. StumbleUpon—the name was Camp's idea—launched in November, 2001.

Camp summed it up this way: “Google is cool if you know what you want. But what if you don't know what you want?” Users would select general categories they were interested in, then “stumble” through related pages with the click of a button. They could also give pages thumbs-up or thumbs-down reviews, which taught StumbleUpon which content users wanted. A search might take you from the 32 greatest unscripted movie scenes to electronics projects for beginners to the Internet encyclopedia of philosophy.

Within a year, with no marketing or outside investment, StumbleUpon had 50,000 users. “In dorm rooms, people would ask, ‘What are you doing?’” Camp recalls. “And people would say, ‘Oh, I'm Stumbling.’ And that's kind of how it spread.”

StumbleUpon was more than just a time-suck, however. If you've ever “liked” something on Facebook, or used discovery and social media platforms like Pinterest and Flipboard, at least some credit is due to Camp's creation. Back in 2001, the Internet was widely uncharted territory. Google was still a fringe search engine, and there was no such thing as social media to help us find stuff we didn't know we were looking for, says Clive Thompson, a tech journalist and author of *Smarter Than You Think: How Technology Is Changing Our Minds for the Better*. “In a way, serendipity is one of [social media's] products. And here's this company that, years before, had identified that as crucial to web browsing.”

Investors in Calgary didn't see StumbleUpon's potential. Camp met with a few, and even had one casual acquisition offer. But the conversations always came down to the bottom line. “I realize now it was because those people were from oil and gas companies, and they didn't think about the technology,” says Camp.

Then, in 2005, California-based investor and long-time StumbleUpon fan Brad O'Neill invited Camp and Smith to San Francisco, where they met high-profile investors, including Mitch Kapor. About 15 minutes into Camp's pitch, Kapor—who designed Lotus 1-2-3, the first killer app for the IBM PC—recalls saying: “This sounds like it will work. I'm in.”

“Sometimes you just get a feeling like that—not often, but sometimes,” says Kapor, who has invested in roughly 50 tech start-ups (including Uber). “There was something about the clarity and simplicity of the concept, and Garrett's quiet confidence. It was a wonderful window into the Internet just as it was really exploding.” Kapor also couldn't believe StumbleUpon had been created by a kid in what he considered to be “the middle of nowhere.”

Kapor and fellow VCs Steve Russell and Ram Shriram helped put together a \$1.5-million seed funding round in December, 2005, and Camp and Smith rented an apartment in San Francisco.

In 2007, with StumbleUpon's user base at 2.3 million, eBay—looking for a way to help customers see more of what they wanted and of what they didn't know they wanted—swooped in. Camp was reluctant to sell, but the offer was too

## SOME OF UBER'S FAMOUS INVESTORS



**Ashton Kutcher**  
(actor and tech VC)



**Britney Spears**  
(pop star)



**Jeff Bezos**  
(Amazon founder)



**Troy Carter**  
(former Lady Gaga manager)



**Shawn Fanning**  
(Napster founder)

PHOTOGRAPHS (KALANICK) DANISH SIDDIQUI/REUTERS; (KUTCHER & SPEARS) MARIO ANZILONI/REUTERS; (BEZOS) TED S. WARREN/REUTERS; (CARTER) STEVE JENNINGS/GETTY; (FANNING) MICHAEL BUCKNER/GETTY

**\$12 BILLION** Total debt and equity financing raised by Uber



## UBER BRO

Uber owes its brash and combative style to its CEO. Here are a few classic Travis Kalanick sound bites

“[The idea for Uber] was a lifestyle thing. Me, my co-founder, and our 100 friends could roll around San Francisco like ballers.”  
—*Fast Company*, 2012

“We knew that [rival] Lyft was going to raise a ton of money. And we are going [to their investors], ‘Just so you know, we're going to be fundraising after this, so before you decide whether you want to invest in them, just make sure you know that we are going to be fundraising immediately after.’”  
—*Vanity Fair*, 2014

“We're in a political campaign, and the candidate is Uber and the opponent is an asshole named Taxi.”  
Code Conference, 2014

“At the peak, I was number seven in the country on *Angry Birds*. If somebody gives me a casual game and says, ‘OK, here's the world record,’ I'll just go until I'm there.”  
—*Financial Times*, 2014

“Yeah, we call that Boob-er.”  
—Kalanick jokes about having women on demand, *GQ*, 2014

“I realize that I can come off as a somewhat fierce advocate for Uber. I also realize that some 'a'-word to describe me.”  
—Speech on Uber's fifth anniversary, 2015

# 5

## BIGGEST BEEFS AGAINST UBER

### LICENSING

**The critics:** Uber is operating an illegal taxi business, with no regulatory oversight.

**Uber:** We're a tech company, so we're not subject to the same rules as taxis. Get with the times, olds.

### DRIVER SCREENING

**The critics:** Uber drivers don't undergo rigorous criminal background checks like cabbies. Several have been charged with assault, and in February, a Michigan driver shot six people in between picking up fares.

**Uber:** It requires (lighter) background checks, and relies on passenger ratings to keep drivers in line.

### SURGE PRICING

**The critics:** Uber unfairly jacks fares at peak times and during crises (including Hurricane Sandy). An Edmonton man was charged \$1,115 for a ride on New Year's Eve.

**Uber:** Surge pricing is the only way to get more drivers on the road to meet demand.

### UNFAIR LABOUR PRACTICES

**The critics:** Uber drivers are considered contractors, which means they have no benefits or job security. Two class-action lawsuits in the U.S. allege that they are, in fact, employees.

**Uber:** Set your own schedule! Earn on your own terms!

### INSURANCE

**The critics:** Most drivers don't carry the same pricey commercial insurance cabs are required to have.

**Uber:** It insists "riders, drivers and everyone else on the road" are protected by Uber's own insurance. But the Insurance Bureau of Canada has indicated that insurance likely doesn't cover the drivers themselves.

good to pass up: \$75 million and almost complete autonomy, with Canadian Michael Buhr, head of eBay's strategy group, as general manager. "Garrett was very innovative in how he thought about products, very focused on what's right for the consumer," says Buhr.

For the first time, Camp was working because he wanted to, not because he had to. "That was kind of a cool shift," he says. He bought an apartment near Stumble's headquarters in the SoMa neighbourhood and invested "a million or two million bucks" in the stock market.

That year, at age 28, he was named to the *MIT Technology Review's* list of the top 35 innovators under age 35, along with 23-year-old Zuckerberg. A year later, he was part of *Bloomberg BusinessWeek's* list of Tech's Best Young Entrepreneurs, alongside Dropbox's Drew Houston and Etsy co-founder Robert Kalin.

Being part of eBay exposed StumbleUpon to a much wider audience, and registered users hit five million. But it had downsides, like periodic hiring freezes and a strict ceiling for salaries, which made it hard to compete with nimble pre-IPO start-ups with substantial stock option plans.

In 2009, Camp and Smith (who has remained the company's chief technology officer since its launch) bought StumbleUpon back from eBay for a reported \$29 million. "I think eBay sort of knew that I'd probably kind of try something else," Camp says. "They decided to go with it."

By then, however, Camp had a new obsession: a simple app he'd devised called UberCab.

**T**he romanticized version of Uber's origin story describes a snowy night late in 2008, when Camp and Kalanick agreed to launch a world-changing company while standing at the top of the Eiffel Tower.

Camp had actually come up with the idea six months earlier, while waiting half an hour for a Yellow cab on a San Francisco street corner, making him late for a date. As he watched taxis whiz past him, many of them empty, he realized the cab industry was begging for disruption—an unco-ordinated network of cars commanded by a decades-old dispatch system. When he checked the nascent App Store on his iPhone, he found no solution to his problem.

On Aug. 4, 2008, he registered the domain *ubercab.com* and, on his time off from eBay, began developing a prototype app for what was originally a limo-sharing service.

But he knew he needed a partner—someone who could actually run the company. He'd met Kalanick at a tech conference in Hawaii the year before. Like Camp, Kalanick had recently sold his start-up, Red Swoosh, and was half-heartedly paying his dues under the buying company. The pair stayed in touch, and during the summer he started working on UberCab, Camp attended a few all-night entrepreneurial brainstorming sessions, known as "jam sessions," at Kalanick's San Francisco apartment—a.k.a. "the jam pad." That's where Camp first publicly discussed his idea.

Kalanick was reluctant to join a new venture, but Camp kept pushing. As he told *Vanity Fair* in 2014 (in a profile of Kalanick), he admired Kalanick's "quality of going for it. I knew such a big idea would take a lot of guts, and he impressed me as someone who had that."

In the winter of '08, at Paris's LeWeb conference, Kalanick agreed to join Uber, but only part-time.

Camp put up most of the \$200,000 required to complete the app—an order and payment system that allowed users to track and rate drivers. They ran their first beta test with three Lincoln Town Cars in New York City in 2010. "People said it wouldn't work in New York because taxis were too easy to get, and we started to see decent numbers out of New York," says Camp. So they launched another three cars in San Francisco—a city with crummy cab coverage—and had great

uptake there, too. "So we were pretty sure it would work for most cities," says Camp.

Their first chunk of financing—a \$1.25-million seed round led by First Round Capital, which also funded StumbleUpon—came in October, 2010. That same month, Uber got a cease-and-desist letter from the San Francisco Metro Transit Authority and California Public Utilities Commission. It read: "The name UberCab indicates that you are a taxicab company or affiliated with a taxicab company, and as such you are under the jurisdiction of the SFMTA."

So Camp dumped "Cab" from the company's name, buying the *uber.com* domain from Universal Music Group in exchange for a 2% stake in the start-up. (Uber later bought back the shares—now worth more than \$1 billion—for \$1 million.)

Since then, Uber has launched the low-fare UberX, giving almost anyone with a smartphone and a car the opportunity to become a driver, and UberTaxi, which allows regulated cabbies to pick up Uber customers. The company's value has continued to balloon, with its most recent round of funding putting it at \$62.5 billion. This, despite the fact that Uber reportedly lost \$697 million in the third quarter of 2015 on revenue of less than \$500 million.

Offering cheap rides is nowhere near Uber's endgame. Clive Thompson says it aims to become a "central hub" for services, the same way Amazon moved from books to everything e-commerce. After solidifying its logistics network, Uber launched Uber-Fresh (now a separate app called Uber-Eats), which delivers local gourmet food daily, and UberRush, which allows customers to have items picked up from anywhere in select cities and delivered immediately. Uber has already partnered with Ottawa-based e-commerce software maker Shopify so virtual-store owners can offer their customers same-day delivery. Though none of these has yet experienced success as ubiquitous as the primary service, the potential is nearly limitless.

For Camp, the most compelling offshoots are UberHop, which transports customers along a fixed route at a flat rate, and UberPool, which helps users hook up with fellow commuters to split fares.

"Traffic is the sort of thing where you reduce the number of cars on the road by a certain percentage and there's no traffic," Camp says. "There's really a breaking point in these systems." In places like China, he says, these kinds of services could even reduce the number of cars bought in the first place, and significantly reduce pollution.

### THE UBER OF...

Uber is now synonymous with peer-to-peer business. Here are just a few of the start-ups pitching themselves as the Uber of something.

#### Snowplowing

LawnGuru

#### Content marketing

ArticleBunny

#### Errands

TaskRabbit

#### Chores

Handybook

#### Tutoring

Chegg

#### Plastic surgery

Zwivel

#### Valet parking

Luxe



### FOUNDERS WHO LEFT CANADA

**Eric Migicovsky**  
(Pebble Smart Watch, San Francisco)

**Nicholas Desmarais**  
and **Daniel Saks**  
(AppDirect, San Francisco)

**Apoorva Mehta**  
(Instacart, San Francisco)

**Darrell Cavens**  
(Zulily, Seattle)



### FOUNDERS WHO STAYED

**Stewart Butterfield**  
(Slack, Vancouver)

**Tobias Lutke**  
(Shopify, Ottawa)

**Ted Livingston**  
(Kik Interactive, Waterloo)

**Allen Lau** and  
**Ivan Yuen**  
(Wattpad, Toronto)

**C**amp is adamant he's worth far less than what *Forbes* suggests. But he does admit he's had a shift in perspective from when he first left

his folks' basement for San Francisco—the kind that comes with suddenly having lots of money.

He says he can now ask questions like: "How can I help other people? How can I invest in the companies of people that I think are interesting, and in products I'd like to see in the world?"

That, he claims, is what Expa is all about. Camp calls his latest venture a "start-up studio," where he and four partners are applying lessons culled from a combined 50-plus years in tech to help build companies from scratch. It's more hands-on than an accelerator or VC firm, and allows Camp to be part of the "creative breakthroughs" that happen most often in the early phase—and then move on and leave the grind of management to someone else.

Expa has gathered \$150 million in funding from high-profile investors including Sir Richard Branson, WordPress creator Matt Mullenweg, billionaire Li Ka-shing and HP CEO Meg Whitman, who was eBay's CEO when it purchased StumbleUpon. So far, Camp has invested in nine companies, including Spot, where friends and experts recommend the best places around the world; Kit, a community that lets users peek inside each other's closets and cupboards to see their favourite products; and Mix, a discovery engine that might

be the next evolution of StumbleUpon (though Camp says they're "still figuring things out").

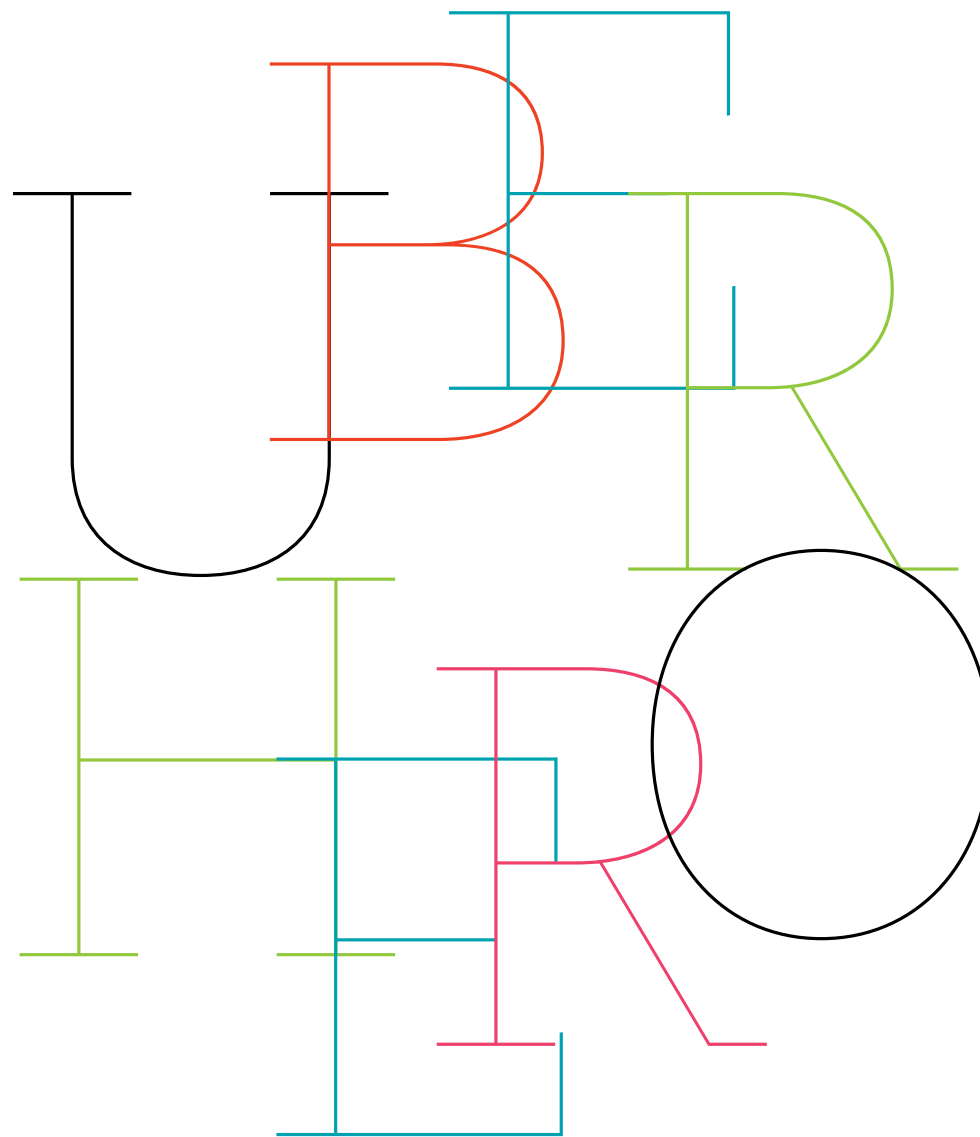
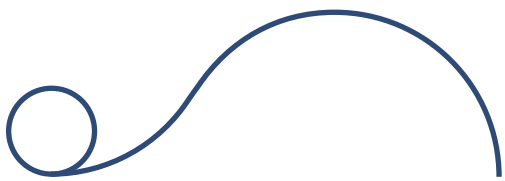
Operator, a shopping app that connects customers with product experts via text message, hopes to cut Amazon and Google out of the e-tail equation. Say you're looking for a stainless-steel espresso machine for less than \$200. Instead of combing through Google searches, Amazon customer reviews and "best-of" listicles, you send a message on Operator and a coffee-making expert replies with her pick and a link to where to buy it.

The next logical step: having it delivered within an hour by Uber. "That seems like such an efficient way to combine man and machines," says Camp.

That idea has been a thread throughout Camp's career. StumbleUpon's algorithms were fuelled by recommendations from its community. Uber ceases to function without a vast and willing fleet of drivers and, of course, passengers in search of cheap rides. Operator is predicated on its experts making quick and useful recommendations.

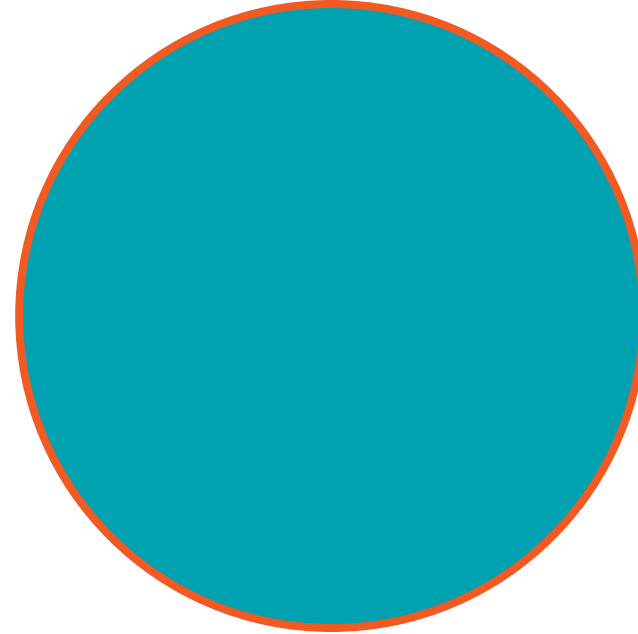
"The whole point of these systems is to improve user experience, and that's kind of where the name Expa came from—experience apps," he says. "I always think about how the human can be part of that system, because a lot of times that's what makes it feel magical."

As for the man behind the magic, he might just be the wealthiest Canadian alive before he hits 40 (at least on paper). In that case, he could have no choice but to step out from behind the curtain.





UBER



UBER

