

50 St. Louis sites, apps, companies, and people you should know

BY NANCY McMULLEN, JARRETT MEDLIN, AND MARGARET SCHNEIDER
EDITED BY MARGARET SCHNEIDER

Today's must-have apps and gadgets are adaptable, efficient, and above all, well-connected—and cities with those attributes tend to do well, too. As *Wired* contributing editor Jonah Lehrer reports in his latest book, *Imagine*, "Cities exhibit superlinear growth: As they get bigger, every person in the city gets more productive." Connections are key, and St. Louis has no shortage. This is the birthplace of the term "blogosphere," after all, a city whose maps inspired Twitter and Square co-founder Jack Dorsey and whose arts community has given Square co-founder Jim McKelvey a place to play.

Those attributes are at the heart of the city's top digital products, too—and the materials tech that may shape the flexible energy sources (and superlight cars) of the future. Local libraries and restaurants alike are using Web apps to serve the public. And our data hubs, coworking spaces, and startup incubators are changing how—and where—we do our work.

SLM talked to experts and scanned social media, blogs, and more to find the top contributors to our city's tech conversation. Read on to learn more. —M.S.

Tom NiemeierARCHITECT AND FOUNDER
OF SPACE

1. Contemporist.com: "This is always a good site to see some of the best modern design of the day, including furniture and architecture."

2. Wunderlist: "This list-based program helps me organize my things to do by project. I have it automatically synced with all of my devices, including the iPad, iPhone, and laptop... And it's free!"



3. RunKeeper: "This free, GPS-based iPhone app lets you track your progress... and helps me set and target specific fitness goals."

Christina MachamerCHEF AND WINNER OF REALITY
SHOW *HELL'S KITCHEN*

1. Google: "Where would I be without Google? It is my go-to source for finding everything from directions to unique facts to end arguments..."

2. Netflix: "I travel a lot, and being able to stream on my iPhone during hours-long layovers is key."

3. A Zombies Guide to Wine: "This is a whimsical guide to wine from a hilarious sommelier. I think he gave pretension the middle finger..."

David RobertsonMUSIC DIRECTOR OF THE
ST. LOUIS SYMPHONY

1. STL Symphony Blog: Publications manager Eddie Silva provides a lively account of happenings at Powell Hall and beyond. Robertson reads it regularly, "particularly when I am traveling."

2. NYTimes.com: *The New York Times* website keeps Robertson up to speed on world news.



3. The Rest Is Noise: Alex Ross, *The New Yorker*'s music critic, blogs on topics from Italian composers to opera at the Met.

100 JUNE 2012 | **stlmag.com**

Tagged as Trending

11 ST. LOUIS TECH NOTABLES MAKING A REAL-WORLD IMPACT

The May issue of *Wired* highlighted Klout, a company that pulls metrics from social networks to give you a single measure of influence: the Klout score. In St. Louis, marketing agency Infuz built **STL Index** (stlindex.com) last year to measure local influence, ranking Twitter users by STL score (the lower, the better).

Last month, **COCABiz** (cocastl.org) brought in blogger Seth Godin and tech writer Jonah Lehrer for its second "business creativity" conference, SPARK, which included *pecha kucha*-style presentations. Miss the conference? The next **PechaKucha Night St. Louis** (pecha-kucha.org/night/saint-louis) takes place July 12 at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis.

Collectives are also changing the way St. Louis connects. Spaces like **Arch Reactor** (archreactor.org) and **Saint Louis Coworking** (stlcoworking.com)—and networks like **WasabiNet** (sites.google.com/site/wasabinetwifl), which runs mesh Wi-Fi in the vicinity of Cherokee Street—now provide St. Louisans with low-cost ways to share ideas.

Across the river, Swansea, Ill.-based **Juggle** (juggle.com) is rethinking Web commerce. The company runs CrowdSource and Write.com, sourcing workers through Amazon Mechanical Turk, as well as LocalDeal.com, which aggregates daily deals; shopping site MonsterMarketplace; domain broker ClickableNames; advertising network ROImedia; and debate site Debate.org.

In April, local nonprofit biotech startup **Rare Genomics Institute** (raregenomics.org) received a \$30,000 grant from D.C.'s inaugural Praxis Accelerator Program. The institute helps families of those with rare diseases run Kickstarter-style microfunding campaigns, connect with researchers for gene sequencing, and consult with doctors and genetic counselors to apply that research.

The computers these companies rely on, as well as smartphones and hybrid cars, use rare earth metals—most of which come from China. **ThREEM3** hopes to change that by mining rare earth metals at the Pea Ridge mine in Sullivan; once processing begins, it will be one of only two U.S. rare-earth producers. The difficulty: safely separating the metals from radioactive thorium.

As *Popular Science* has reported, ThREEM3 is lobbying to use the thorium in small nuclear reactors. In the meantime, **Nidec Motor Corporation** (nidec-motor.com) has developed switched-reluctance motors that work without rare earth metals or magnets. And **Zoltek** (zoltek.com) estimates that more than 20,000 tons of its carbon fiber is now in use in wind turbines worldwide, helping make sustainable energy generation a reality. The company's carbon fiber may also make future cars lighter and more efficient.

From social-media algorithms to hardcore materials science, St. Louisans are creating the building blocks of the future.

—M.S.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID TORRENCE, KATHERINE BISH, AND MICHAEL TAMMARGO

Office Space

HOW TECHNOLOGY IS
CHANGING THE WAY
ST. LOUIS WORKS

MORE THAN A DECADE AGO, downtown officials labeled Washington Avenue “St. Louis’ Silicon Alley.” Then, after the tech bubble burst, things changed. Today, startups are making a comeback—largely with business models far different than when Wash. Ave. first earned its nickname. In early May, for instance, nonprofit Arch Grants announced the winners of its inaugural startup competition, with funding going to outfits like Techli (tech.li), an online magazine covering Midwestern digital startups.

Other companies on the rise are those involved with cloud computing, or the ability to process and store massive amounts of data online. While companies like Google and Facebook have been deploying massive server clusters for some time, it’s only in the past five years that the cloud has really taken off—creating change on the ground in regional hubs like St. Louis. Replacing expensive

in-house servers, the cloud cuts company costs and lets employees access information remotely via laptops, smartphones, and tablets. St. Louis businesses like Connectria Hosting, Contegix, Datotel, Savvis, and Xiolink have jumped

to meet demand, offering storage and software for a price. (In fact, the *St. Louis Business Journal* recently reported that Savvis’ cloud business is growing nearly 25 percent annually.) There’s even a committee, the St. Louis Cloud Coalition, working to develop a media hub along the Delmar Loop’s proposed trolley right-of-way.

Other sectors are also embracing electronic storage. Months before Kindred Healthcare acquired the company last June, RehabCare Group was reportedly using roughly 4,000 iPods, iPhones, and iPads to enter patient data and track medical records. At the same time, Maryland Heights-based Essence Group Holdings Corporation has led the charge for electronic health records. In September 2010, its ClearPractice subsidiary launched Nimble, a health-records app for the iPad. Last year, it introduced Eden, cloud-based health-records software that works on Apple’s iOS devices and computers.

Handheld health apps and the cloud were largely still a dream in 2000, when the Wash. Ave. tech corridor got its start—and now they’re changing the tech landscape in St. Louis and beyond. —J.M.

5 Fave Local Twitter Accounts



@RizzoTees Now the VP of social media at marketing agency Falk Harrison, Chris Reimer is a hit on Twitter, with more than 56,000 followers at press time and an STLi score of 0.89 (remember: the lower, the better). **@murphylee** The prolific St. Louis rapper practically lives on Twitter, averaging 48 to 65 tweets per day on everything from the local music scene to St. Louis happenings. **@dfreeze23** Want to know what it’s like to be a Cardinals slugger?

David Freese tweets his thoughts on the latest game, quotes from inside the locker room, and more. **@MayorSlay** Those who want an inside look at the workings of City Hall would do well to follow Mayor Francis Slay. His account posts breaking St. Louis news, from politics to sports to entertainment. (Posts written by the mayor himself are tagged #fgs.) **@RobustWineBar** Stanley and Arlene Browne, the owners of Robust Wine Bar, post about way more than just wine. Follow them to find out about major developments in the St. Louis food scene.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GABRIELLE LAMARR LEMEE

8 FAVE LOCAL APPS

1 AISLE411 Among more than two dozen startups funded since 2005 by St. Louis Arch Angels (stlouisarchangels.com), this may be the coolest. You can create a shopping list, browse recipes, and map your route through major grocery stores to make your shopping trips as efficient as possible. You could even use it to find another recent Arch Angels investment, Nawgan brain drink. *Free. Available for iOS and Android.*

2 FOREST PARK Download this app for information on park attractions, maps, upcoming events, and more. Twenty percent of proceeds go to Forest Park Forever. *\$2.99. Available for iOS.*

3 MODOT TRAVELER INFORMATION MAP This map app provides the latest on road conditions, work zones, flooding, and more in Missouri. (Just be sure your navigator’s the one checking the phone.) *Free. Available for iOS and Android.*

4 ST. LOUIS WEATHER KMOV-TV’s weather app determines your location and gives you a detailed forecast, weather conditions, and alerts. *Free. Available for iOS and Android.*

5 KID CARE If your child is injured or ill, this St. Louis Children’s Hospital app can help you make decisions about the level of medical care needed and how to treat a child at home when it’s safe to do so. *Free. Available for iOS and Android.*

6 METRO STL Developed by Washington University lecturer Todd Sproull, this app gives you the MetroLink information you need, including schedules for each station and maps showing the stations and your location. *\$1.99. Available for iOS.*

7 EXPLORE ST. LOUIS This app lists restaurants, attractions, hotels, shops, transportation, and more, with results based on your location. *Free. Available for iOS, Android, and BlackBerry.*

8 SQUARE St. Louisan Jim McKelvey and Twitter co-founder Jack Dorsey co-founded this service, which lets users accept credit-card payments through their phones or tablets with a free card reader. Whether you’re a retailer or you just want to square up with a friend for lunch, the app makes payment pain-free. *Free. Available for iOS and Android.*

stlmag.com | JUNE 2012 101



Smoothing Sales

TECH IS IMPROVING THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AT LOCAL COMPANIES.

When Chris Sommers opened the first Pi location just four years ago, in 2008, the iPad was two years away and Twitter had just surpassed a million users.

Today, Pi has more than a half-dozen locations nationwide, and the evolution of technology has entirely altered the way it does business.

"The Internet and social media are the 21st-century comment card," Sommers says. "Technology gives me a lot of visibility as to what's going on in my restaurants and helps us see what our customers are saying. I can communicate with my staff, I can see real-time what's going on, I can see sales, and I can physically watch what's going on via cameras from the store, all on my iPhone."

In 2009, another St. Louisan, Third Degree Glass Factory owner Jim McKelvey, was unable to complete a sale because he couldn't accept a credit card. McKelvey shared his predicament with friend and Twitter co-founder Jack Dorsey, who collaborated with him to create Square, one of the most game-changing mobile apps of the past two years. With a Square card reader and an Android or iOS device, restaurateurs like Sommers can easily accept payments on the go, at places like Pi's food trucks in St. Louis and D.C.

Tech is also making shopping a better experience. Retailers like Nordstrom are taking cues from Apple's stores, where employees with iOS devices ring up your purchase. Now, instead of waiting in line, shoppers at the Saint Louis Galleria Nordstrom can check out on iPads right outside the dressing room, eliminating wait time.

Social networking through Twitter and Facebook has also made it easier for companies to engage with customers and provide perks. "Social business" company Dachis Group has used Twitter and e-newsletters to invite the public to its monthly Visual Thinking School sessions. And local ad firm Moosylvania shares its work with more than a thousand followers on Twitter. Having a presence in these online "third places" (spaces outside of home and work) has become almost crucial to a business's success.

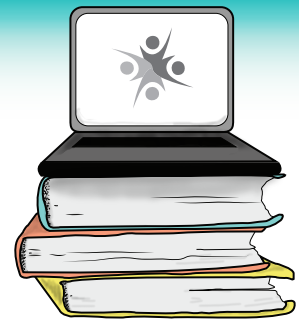
"Guests often don't tell you the good and bad about their experience to your face anymore or on paper," Sommers says. "They're talking about it to their social networks. Instead of one-to-one communication at the water cooler...they're telling several hundred, several thousand people about it. We want to be able to either nip that in the bud or to take advantage of it and engage them." —N.M.



5 Fave Local Blogs and Websites

I Went to a Show (iwenttoashow.com). Read this music blog on the regular and you'll add at least a new artist or two to your iPod every week. **Punching Kitty (punchingkitty.com).**

These cats pull no punches. Mike Flynn's blog is basically St. Louis' own Gawker, calling out the humor and hypocrisy in local news. **keaggy.com.** We could spend hours on serial project-starter Bill Keaggy's personal site. As he says on his about page, "Despite what you may think, it does not waste a lot of my time—just yours." **Nuestra Vida Dulce (daveandjoi.blogspot.com).** Does your space feel sloppy? Visit Joi and David Svezia's blog to learn how to design on a budget. **Cupcake Project (cupcakeproject.com).** Stef Pollack's "fun experimental cupcake blog" is a definite fave—and it's garnered the food blogger nationwide acclaim.



WORTH CHECKING OUT

HOW LIBRARIES ARE EVOLVING IN TODAY'S BRAVE NEW WORLD

THE RISE OF WIKIPEDIA spurred some to believe traditional books—and, in turn, libraries—would soon be a thing of the past. Instead, libraries now play an even greater role in bridging the generation gap and providing a vital resource during an economic downturn. And technology is transforming these public resources in myriad ways as well.

Beyond basic computer classes, the St. Louis County Library now has courses on "digital literacy" topics like online photo editing, using databases for Civil War research, and even how to use coupon codes and online discounts. In January, it unveiled a mobile app, SLCL Mobile, which lets patrons on most smartphones search the catalog, download e-media, and more. By mid-April, the app already had 4,100 downloads. "One of the key features is that it simplifies e-media downloads," says St. Louis County Library communications manager Jennifer McBride. "That's probably the fastest-growing part of our collection—in fact, last year, e-media usage was up 89 percent." It's an area that will continue to evolve. As the American Library Association's *2012 State of America's Libraries* report points out, many libraries "only have limited access to e-books because of restrictions placed on their use by the nation's largest publishers." As demand grows, that could change.

The St. Louis Public Library has also continued to adapt. Besides hosting computer classes and helping patrons with online job searches, it's added an Ask a Librarian service, and it continues to expand its collection of videos, audiobooks (available in WMA and MP3 formats), and e-books. And this fall, the renovated Central Library will include new data ports in its oak tables and building-wide Wi-Fi—a definite perk while working inside its new café. —J.M. ■



MORE ONLINE!
Go to stlmag.com/tech to find more local apps, blogs, websites, and more.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KEVIN A. ROBERTS; ILLUSTRATIONS BY GABRIELLE LAMARR LEWEE