



GayMonkey's

# Matt Skallerud Grabs the Big Banana

by David King

Somehow in the evolution of virtual realities, it's familiar to find oneself flirting on multiple chat sites while sending out that magnetism vibe via music, video, and photo frequencies. So easy in fact, we do it at the same time with one hand, saving the other to type up the latest blog entry (among other things, of course).

Let's invent "Denis". Registered at Hotmail and Myspace as "DJdenis1987zzz", he's also registered at gay.com as "HairyLarry",

on Gaydar as "BobTheBuilder" and to his Facebook friends as "TennisDennis". Determined to be accidentally discovered, Denis has set-up 8 vids of his dog's stupid pet tricks under the series "Woofers" on YouTube, all under his alias "DenBarkProductions".

So, as Denis' multiple personalities play out (and raise some serious time management issues), he's got at least one challenge on his hands: how on earth will he remember all those user names and passwords?

With the recent launch of PinkBananaWorld.com, GayWired.com founder Matt Skallerud is following a new trend online in "hyper-aggregating" – that is, finding one-stop solutions like umbrella sites for web-heads who regularly access multiple profiles and services. Based out of L.A., Skallerud is not alone in integrating time online with a monster site, but he's certainly one of the few tapping into an aggregated 'pink' market, and as such, he's taking online queer life to a whole new level.



Matt Skallerud

Oh, that's easy... I started back in 1995 with GayWired.com. Turned that into a successful site and took what worked for the boys to create LesbiaNation.com for the girls. That worked. Then we kept going, creating Navigaytion.com for gay travel, GaySports.com for gay sports... anyway, it was all tied together for marketing and branding purposes into the GayWebMonkey Network. We had a print magazine, website... the works! So it was a natural progression to go from the monkey to the banana. As soon as I launched it, everyone I knew in the industry knew right away it was me!

### How did things unfold, after being so immersed in other sites?

Fortunately, I had recently sold the GayWebMonkey network of sites and thus freed myself up to brainstorm and create something completely new and fresh. This whole concept of both "hyperaggregating" all of the gay content that is out there, together with hyperaggregating gay peoples' lives online; whether their online life is spent on YouTube, MySpace, etc... from our perspective, it doesn't matter. Our goal is simply to bring it all together and make it so that gays and lesbians worldwide can have one resource from which to find all things gay and one resource from which to show off their best angle to the online GLBT community.

### Where did the name, ahem, "Pink Banana" come from?

No... I'm lazy on this one. I use MattSkal on all of the sites I have a profile on, so it creates a little sense of continuity from site to site.

### 'Matt Skal' isn't exactly an original a screen name for someone like you. What's up with that? Don't you have a gay avatar or a dirty-little-secret alias somewhere?

### How will PinkBananaWorld.com revolutionize queer networking online?

Our fundamental rule is to not "reinvent the wheel." Everyone has a life online and has uploaded their photos to Flickr or Picassa, their videos to YouTube or Revver, and has a MySpace and perhaps a Facebook profile. We come in and say "hey, you don't need to do any additional work here. Just let us know where your accounts are and everytime you upload a new photo or video, we'll import that into your PinkBananaWorld.com profile for the gay & lesbian world to see!" It's unique in that to date, most sites are what we call "walled gardens," whereby you must upload all of your photos and videos in their site only. Your profile is completely determined by the questions they ask you and the permissions they give you for what photos you can upload and which ones you cannot. We are trying to eliminate the "walled garden" philosophy and work with other sites online, sharing both content and user profile information quickly and easily. It's the wave of the future, whether it's called OpenSocial (a new programming language being used to tie together Google, MySpace, YouTube and many other sites into one big sharing application) or by any other name, the online world is moving towards being able to move and share information from site to site. The online user owns the content... why not let the

online user choose when and where he or she wants to share it!

### How does inter-accessibility work if you're also using Facebook, Flickr, YouTube and MySpace, for example?

It's all done using RSS feeds and XML. It's kind of like advanced HTML web programming for moving data across online networks. It's become the standard in almost all aspects of data movement, used by news companies such as BBC and CNN, as well as banks when securely transmitting your bank statements to your computer. We've simply written custom code to bring in this content for gays & lesbians worldwide who wish to join our network and share their information.

### What would you say are some of the biggest flaws in queer sites today? What do the sites need to do to increase hits and truly generate a following as we all spend more time online?

Most sites are relying on what worked for them in the past. The business model for a site that simply takes content, merges it with a membership base and serves ads to its visitors, is a good model but one that is pre-2000. You're seeing most gay & lesbian sites today continue to follow that path, with little to no innovation. Gaydar recently launched GayDarNation, completely with content and, get this, eCards. Who offers eCards anymore?

That was so 1998. The same goes for other more established sites as well. It's no secret that PlanetOut/Gay.com has been losing market share and thus revenues to sites such as Manhunt.net that focus exclusively on personals... it's in the news today how they are now actively seeking to be purchased. The only company that has taken a leap forward in the gay space over the past few years is dList.com. They've done a great job of taking the best of MySpace and making a version that is just for gay men. They started in the New York City area and by allowing guys to upload their adult photos and videos, leapt ahead in that market and have continued to grow in other parts of the US as well. But without innovations, such as what Facebook has brought to the online social networking table, sites such as dList.com will also have to adapt or become irrelevant in the next few years.

### What would you say are your new site's best features?

We still have some work to do in the "graphics" department.... our focus has been mostly functionality and a simple, clean look. I find that users love the videos we find each day from Truveo, Revver and YouTube. These are GLBT videos that quite often go unnoticed by the common user. We find them and feature them, alongside hot photos from some of the top photo bloggers online.

In addition, from a user's profile perspective, we're finding more and more people taking advantage of our photo and video integration in a strong way. Turns out quite a few folks out there have uploaded some fun (and at times rather campy) videos, which are entertaining in their own right.

### What are your own personal, favourite queer sites (outside of the ones you've been so involved in)?

So far I think dList.com is my favorite. They're the most cutting edge this year and the most fun to play on.

### Where do you think we're headed, in terms of on-line socializing and hook-ups?

As online networking and concurrently hook-ups continue to migrate to the more advanced social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace, I think you'll find this trend to simply continue. It's not just that meeting people here is free... that is a plus. However, it's the whole concept of a "warm" introduction versus a cold one. It's easier for many folks to meet someone at a house party with friends than it is to go to a gay bar alone and just pick up someone. The same analogy holds true for the online world, and you're finding people using these social networking sites to meet new friends from within their own network of contacts and friends.