



PIVOT: REINVENTION CENTRAL

# Twitter's Biz Stone: Why I Brought My Startup Back From the Dead

The Twitter cofounder talks about the thinking behind his revival of a seemingly failed company, Jelly.



BY TESS TOWNSEND

 [@Tess\\_Townsend](https://twitter.com/Tess_Townsend)



Some entrepreneurs succeed by persisting at an idea until they make it work, others by being nimble and changing strategies as needed. Twitter cofounder Biz Stone falls into a third category, one he has almost to himself after his "unpivot" of the question-and-answer app Jelly. Stone announced in a Medium post last week that he was bringing the startup back from the dead, by something less than popular demand.

Jelly never officially disappeared. Stone says the original version of the human-powered

search engine kept running even as the Jelly Industries team turned its attention to other projects like opinion-sharing app Super. He termed the decision to renew the team's focus on Jelly an "un-pivot," meaning the reversal of a pivot or change in direction of a company.

The new version of Jelly, now in closed beta, will differ from the old in a few ways. Users will be able to answer questions anonymously, and the startup is using new ways to identify in what areas users have expertise to better match questions to sources for answers.

"Jelly is something that can be relaunched, or 'un-pivoted,' because it's a big idea," Stone tells Inc. "The complete re-imagining of search doesn't have one approach, it has many."

He thinks what Jelly has going is promising. Reviving a dead (or "mostly dead") startup might be rare, but it's not isolated, he points out. Here's the full text of an email interview with the entrepreneur about why he thinks Jelly still has a chance at success and what he's learned over the roughly year-long period the project was basically dormant.

## **Why did you decide to shutter Jelly in the first place? Do you still agree with that move?**

We never actually shuttered Jelly, we kept it alive because when it worked, it worked really well. However, we turned our attention away from it because after the initial burst of popularity (more signups in one day than Twitter got in its first year of operation) it was flat and not on a "hot" trajectory.

In retrospect, that wasn't the right move. Numbers are not what make a thing worth pursuing, value is, and there was clearly value in Jelly 1.0. Instead of turning our attention away, we should have doubled down on what was working.

If there's a bright side, it's that turning away for a whole year emboldened us to take a completely fresh look and completely reimagine the best way to achieve our original vision.

Something worth noting is that our overall purpose for being never changed, just our tactics. The "bright spot" of Jelly 1.0 was that when we got questions (we weren't getting

enough and I know why now), we got orders of magnitude more answers. So we launched an app that was basically answers without questions;-that app is called Super. We had a long term plan for Super that wasn't completely dissimilar from Jelly.

## **What are the advantages of reviving a dead platform, rather than starting a new one? (And disadvantages?)**

Luckily, to quote from my favorite movie, *The Princess Bride*, "Jelly 1.0 is not all dead, it's only mostly dead." Since we never shut down the service, there are still some folks who love it. Plus, the brand still has a bit of recognition from such a successful launch.

The advantages of reviving a platform, in our particular case, is that we are bringing back something that people loved and believed in. We've received an overwhelming amount of positivity that Jelly is coming back. This time around we have the advantage of hindsight which as you know is a pretty big deal.

The disadvantage is pretty obvious, it might not work even with this new approach, and we're doing this in a very public arena and we've all got a lot on the line.

## **What happened during the year Jelly was dormant that convinced you to relaunch the platform?**

We launched Super, a social network that combined images and bold statements in a way that built up a corpus of emotionally charged opinions, experiences, stories, and ideas. This was great but when (Jelly Industries cofounder) Ben (Finkel) and I sat down to talk about permanently shutting down Jelly, our company's namesake, we finished that conversation more convinced than ever that Jelly is what we should be committing 100% of our time too.

We didn't start Jelly because we thought the world needed another social network, however novel and interesting. We started Jelly because we had bold dreams of how Search, or rather, the way people get answers to everyday questions, could be approached in a completely different way. We had visions of creating a world in which people enjoyed helping one-another. This is the idea that stopped us in our tracks and forced us to change our lives.

## **What makes Jelly something that can be relaunched or "un-pivoted?"**

Jelly is something that can be relaunched, or "unpivoted," because it's a big idea. The complete re-imagining of search doesn't have one approach, it has many. We think we have the right approach this time based on lessons learned from our first time around, lessons learned from Twitter, and to some degree, lessons learned at Google where I

worked 100 years ago.

## **Is there some kind of rule for the type of startup that can come back from the dead?**

There's no rule for the type of startup that can come back from the dead. But, you do need to have a true belief that it will work, emotional investment in what you're doing, and an unabashed willingness to fail spectacularly if you want to succeed spectacularly.

**PUBLISHED ON: JAN 15, 2016**

ADVERTISEMENT