



## International Mentoring Network Organization

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### Founder of FireFox

*Blake Ross*



This interview of Blake Ross was conducted by Amy Lynn Freeman, Founder and CEO of Symphone Inc.  
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Amy: Well first of all Blake thank you for agreeing to do this interview. We actually thought of talking to you after reading your interview in InformationWeek. My friend Tina went to your website and saw the Get in Their Shoes program. We were like oh what a cool program! We need a mentor. We are in the middle of a couple of startups; we are not ready to talk publicly about what we are doing. So I can't reference it in the interview.

Blake Ross: Alright I know how that goes. Can you say what space it's in at least? Consumer Internet or?

Amy: Definitely Consumer Internet, broad Consumer Internet. You know it's a, let me put it this way. I have a banking systems background and it's basically a data convergence play at a high level. And I think after we talk a little bit I will have a better idea of how to explain it better.

Blake Ross: Okay. Well we might be competing so.

Amy: The questions that I am intending to ask you are my questions but I don't think that they are unique to me.

Blake Ross: Okay.

Amy: So the main area of interest is the concept that you were expressing about there being a corner of the web where people can kind of operate as themselves, call their home. So I agree with that. I think that's where we are seeing things exactly the same way. I don't know if we see how to do that in the same manner. So I thought I would ask you to tell me how you think about it.

Blake Ross: Right, right.

Amy: Because seriously I think it's an important question.

Blake Ross: Okay. So that actually has very much to do with the project I am working on right now. So I also am going to have to be a little bit careful about what I say.

Amy: Okay.

Blake Ross: But the main issue there I think is that we have all of these individual vertical niche applications springing up. So you have got You Tube for video and you have Flickr for photos and all these different kinds of micro-content sites which is great but you know if you are out and you are talking to someone you don't really have an online identity to point them at. You can't really say you know if you want to see more about me and more about my recipes and my photos and my work documents and my family most people don't really have a destination that they can point people to because their identity is kind of spread across all these different websites. And I think that we need to get to a place where people can actually manage and present their own contents, you know a place in the web that has their own address and that they can

really kind of call their own that they can design in their own way and that they can kind of segment up among different audiences because another problem with the world right now, with all these different vertical applications is that they all have their own concepts of a network. So let's say that I have got a bunch of pictures and recipes that I only want to share with my family, me and my family sign up for an account at Epicurious, the recipe site and -- going to sign up for an account at Flickr the photo site just to kind of view those slices of my life. And I think that where we are headed in the future is a way to get people on one site and you know one collection of networks and let them give up their content as they please. Does that make any sense?

Amy: Okay. So what I want to tell you though is the issue of identity is the area that we are focusing on because we see the issue with everybody, I will just tell you because you told me. Everybody is looking at being the home, right?

Blake Ross: Right.

Amy: But where is the identity? Everybody's data is out on banking systems? servers which I used to manage by the way. You know on Ebay servers, on the government servers but they have no servers of their own.

Blake Ross: Exactly.

Amy: So that's where we are looking at

Blake Ross: Right yeah that makes lots of sense to me and of course I mean you have companies like Yahoo and I guess Google is getting into it now where they do try to aggregate all of your data in one place and try to call it your own. But I think that any kind of platform that contains your data has to be extensible and that's kind of where Yahoo and Google fail.

Amy: Correct, you are right exactly. And so how do you see getting around that or what are you saying when you say extensible.

Blake Ross: So what I mean by that is that I want to be able to have all my data in one place because I am going to build up a set of networks. I am going to say alright these are my friends, these are my family. I want to do all of that in one place and be able to share a certain kind of content with certain kinds of people and sites like Yahoo are trying to build.

They are trying to build every possible application for every kind of content themselves. And so if you don't like one other kind of applications where you have all your other data inside Yahoo then you are kind of in trouble which is why by extensible I mean that this kind of personal platform has to allow other developers to come on board, build their own applications, any kind of niche application and have it adapt to your data. So if you are using one application and you know you like a different photo application better you can kind of layer that new photo application on top of your data and just continue using it.

Amy: Right you could basically publish on the multiple parties.

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Amy: But it sounds like we are focusing on different things. So maybe there is a way to take advantage of that. My girlfriend Tina who helped me prepare for this wanted to ask you which is your favorite coffee shop.

Blake Ross: My favorite coffee shop.

Amy: You said in the article you had a favorite coffee shop where you would sit and people would talk about their business plans.

Blake Ross: Yeah.

Amy: Can I join you?

Blake Ross: That's a Clocktower Coffee.

Amy: Clocktower Coffee.

Blake Ross: That's right down the street here in Mountain View. But I don't actually drink coffee I don't think I am their favorite customer.

Amy: So what else should we talk about other than what we have so far?

Blake Ross: I mean I would be happy to meet up separately and we can probably talk more in-depth about what we are working on.

Amy: Okay.

Blake Ross: I can kind of give you little bit of a demo that I have given some other people.

Amy: Oh I would love that okay.

Blake Ross: But and I actually have to run right now.

Amy: Okay.

Patrick: So what did you think of experience to talk with Blake and how has it benefited you?

Amy: Well, it's very, very rare to get an opportunity to speak so directly with someone in such a helpful environment so I like the mentorship. I mean it allows you to ask questions that you might be afraid to ask someone otherwise. Do you follow me?

Patrick: Yeah.

Amy: So this is helpful in a sense of understanding where he is headed from the technology perspective where he sees the markets going. And it's also helpful in terms of understanding his, when you talk to someone and hear their voice, you have a different feeling for the nuance that they have to how they are thinking about things. So it's different than the printed words so I like that. So this has been amazing. I just can't thank you enough.