

If you have been on Twitter this past month, you have heard of [Meerkat](#) . This is an app that allows you to stream video from your mobile phone.

It's barely a month old and already it seems there's a "Meerkat killer." Apparently everyone has suddenly realized there might be value in live mobile streaming. More on that later.

First, how it works. Basically, you open the Meerkat app, push a button and you can broadcast. Simultaneously, your Twitter followers learn you are broadcasting and can watch. They can also comment (well, more accurately, tweet), and you can see that happen in real time as you broadcast. That means you can react to it. Suffice it to say, it is interesting.

You may wonder whether and when this might be useful. I can imagine that the next time a disaster or other news event occurs, we will get some interesting "Meerkating" (yes, it is already a verb). I also saw a journalist from The Economist schedule a video interview on Meerkat, but I have to admit that I spent more time worrying about the "portrait" aspect ratio than the content. But who knows? This may become a thing.

One thing to note about Meerkat is that it isn't exactly a new idea. For instance, a few years ago, a Toronto-based start-up launched [RAUR](#) . RAUR is like Meerkat but is a) audio-only via podcasting, b) actually saves your "work" so that people can listen whenever they want, and c) has a social aspect to it that is familiar to those using social networks.

Because it is not transient, you can actually listen to the output long after it has been broadcast. Here is [my channel](#) (for instance) and here is my recent [broadcast on Meerkat vs RAUR](#) (the topic of the post you are reading now). If you listen, you will see that it is clear but not exactly "good," in that I don't have a radio voice and haven't really prepared. Other people on the network are better. For instance, my own 14-year-old son does prepare and has [his own channel with his own following](#) .

Meerkat, however, with its video and very simple app, has been absorbing all the attention since its launch in February – as well as [the money and a US\\$40 million valuation](#) . Well, at least until

this morning.

This morning, Twitter launched [Periscope](#) (an app by a company that it purchased last year). It is the same as Meerkat, although it seems to work a little more reliably and also has an option to store your videos for 24 hours. (Meerkat does allow you to download and then do whatever you want with your broadcasts now but doesn't do it within the app.) What that means is that you can find stuff to watch on Periscope just as you can on RAUR.

This has provoked much discussion as to [whether Periscope is a Meerkat killer](#) (which, let's face it, sounds far more cruel than the usual Facebook killer tagline).

Who knows and frankly who cares? For starters, we don't know if streaming is important. Also, both these companies are in a position to copy the best features of the other so, in the end, we will end up with something that is the best.

The interesting thing to me is that it is another example of the theory of multiples. This is something that historians of science are familiar with: the tendency for many big ideas to emerge simultaneously (think the [co-discovery of calculus](#) early in the 18th century or so).

It also happens for entrepreneurial ventures. A few years back both Hipstamatic and Instagram had the idea to apply filters to mobile photos to make snaps from your phone look good. Instagram won and is now part of Facebook. What is more, it won by matching a better strategy to this idea than did Hipstamatic. Instagram gave away its app for free and emphasized social sharing, while Hipstamatic did neither. Interestingly, initially, Hipstamatic had more users and more hype – just like Meerkat does today.

I talk more about this notion [here](#) . But the key takeaway is that we don't know who is going to win in this new streaming fight and, moreover, there still may be better and more compelling ways of commercializing the streaming idea that are yet to come. As usual it is fun to watch and, indeed, these days you can watch it on your phone.

Joshua Gans does not work for, consult to, own shares in or receive funding from any company

What Meerkat v Periscope battle means for live mobile streaming

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