AP Interview: Catching up with Twitter's Biz Stone

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SAN FRANCISCO (AP) -- When Twitter turned five years old on March 21, co-founder Isaac "Biz" Stone was on the road celebrating with some of the popular short messaging service's famous users. In the past two weeks, he has appeared on the shows of Conan O'Brien, Howard Stern and Martha Stewart among others. He also made a special stop in Chicago just to take out Twitter's employees there for drinks - a pastime he calls "beersonbiz."

It's a variation on Twitter's weekly employee meetings at its San Francisco headquarters. Although those gatherings are called "Tea Time," Stone told The Associated Press in a recent interview that everyone mostly consumes beer, salsa and chips. He also revealed another Twitter co-founder, Jack Dorsey, had become a regular Tea Time attendee in recent months, even though he technically wasn't working at the company. Dorsey's job status changed Monday when Twitter announced he is coming back to work as the company's executive chairman in charge of product development.

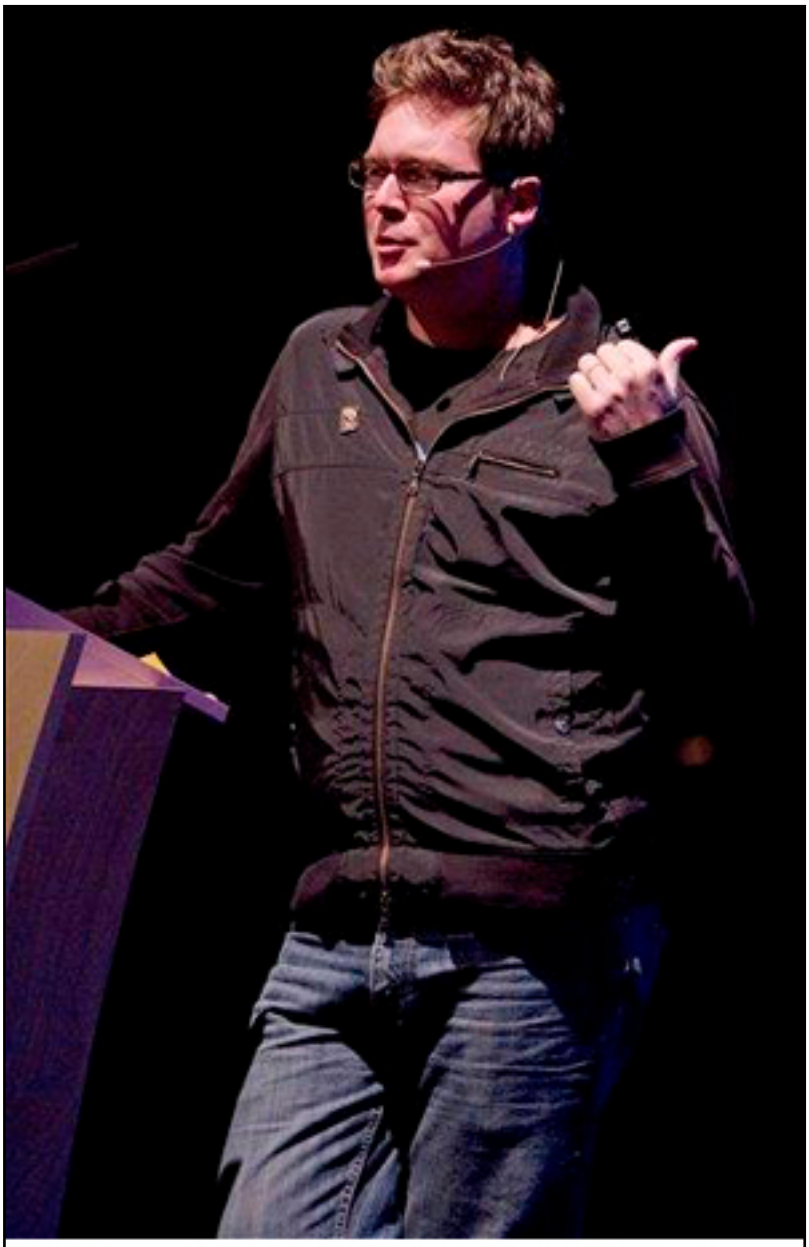
As Dorsey returned, Twitter's third founder, Evan Williams, confirmed he was moving on to explore new business ideas. Williams had stepped down as CEO six months ago and turned the job over to Dick Costolo.

Through it all, Stone has remained a constant, serving as the main face and social conscious of Twitter.

Here are excerpts from the interview with Stone the morning after his night on the town in Chicago.

Q: So you obviously think you can learn a lot about people over a few beers?

I think it's a really big deal to be able to meet people outside the context of something like a conference room or someplace where everything feels like it's formal talk. (Last night) I found out there is a dog named Twitter in a shelter in Chicago that needs adoption so we are going to try to work on that.



In this Oct. 13, 2010 file photo, Isaac "Biz" Stone, co-founder and Creative Director of Twitter Inc, speaks during a conference at the Innovate Tijuana festival in Tijuana, Mexico.

Q: You are a big dog lover, right? Has that been a lifelong thing?

Both my wife and I have a lot of compassion for animals in general. We had two rescue dogs for the past five or six years. One of them, Pedro, recently passed but we still have Maggie. We are always trying to get people to adopt a pet rather than buy a pet from a store.

Q: Any other pets?

We have two cats, we have a rescue tortoise. At any given point in time, my wife has bats, owls, gophers, whatever because she is a wildlife rehabilitator.

Q: Does that make for some interesting times around the house?

Yeah, I remember one time I was concerned there was this kind of weird smell in the hallway. I didn't want to complain to (my wife) Livvy because I knew she would just be like, "Clean it up." When she came home from work, I told her, "I don't want to complain. I just want to tell you there is a kind of weird smell downstairs." And she says, "Oh, that's probably the skunk in the guest room."

Q: Are you a big gadget guy?

Not really. The two things I use the most are the MacBook Air and my iPhone. Those are my two most-used gadgets that are dented, scratched and smashed.

Otherwise, I am not really obsessed with gadgets. If you came to my house, you wouldn't actually see anything. All the technology is hidden in my house. Even in the media room, everything is in a big chest so you can close it.

Q: Is that because you need a break from this wired world?

Yeah, it gives us some detachment. All day long, it's just computer screens and phone calls. When I come home, it's like traveling back in time. I will often read an old book out loud to Livvy while she is cooking dinner or something like that.

I love Sherlock Holmes, but I love any of these old stories where the writer was paid by the word so the adventures just continue forever. They are almost like they were meant to be read out loud.

Q: What's your advice about tweeting while drinking?

Oh, I would say definitely don't do that. That is like emailing while angry. You are better off saying, "You know what, I will just wait until tomorrow to see if it still seems like a good idea."

Q: Did you see "The Social Network?"

I did. The funny thing is my wife didn't want to go to it. But I did and it was the

weirdest thing because when you order a ticket and say, "One for `The Social Network," you feel like you should have brought some friends with you.

Q: What did you think of the movie?

I thought it was a great movie. I am a fan of that style of fast-paced writing where you are challenged to keep up and where you are challenged to fill in the blanks. I recognized a lot of things. It also made me appreciate that we don't have those same kinds of issues.

Q: Do you think anyone should make a movie about Twitter's early days?

If they make anything, I think it should be a really bad sitcom on the CW. I don't think it's movie material. I think it's more like a good half hour, soap operatic sort of thing. It would probably get canceled after three episodes.

Q: Do you ever feel tempted to sell to a suitor?

No, we have created something that was much bigger and has more potential than we ever imagined. What we hadn't done is build a business on top of it. So we got the bug to really carry this through to prove we could. Once that switch flipped in our heads, it has become easier and easier to tell people, "Thank you for your interest, but we are not for sale."

Q: How is the whole moneymaking thing going for you?

It's going really well. We are taking this very slow and thoughtful approach to it, which is frustrating for some Twitter watchers who say, "Why don't you just blow it out?" But we really want to do it right. We are really thrilled with the early indications, but we have a ton more work to do there.

Q: When will Twitter go public?

I have no idea. Whenever I have that conversation, it's always with people outside the company. We are not even discussing that in the board meetings. We are still discussing product decisions. It feels weird. We have been around for five years, but it feels more like five minutes.

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