

Joel Simkhai

Joel Simkhai (/sɪmˈkaɪ/ [ⓘ]; Hebrew: יואל שמחאי‏; born c. 1976^{[1][2]}) is an Israeli-American-French^[3] tech entrepreneur. He is the founder and former CEO of Grindr^[4] and Blendr.^[5] His original goal in starting Grindr was for people with similar interests to find new friends nearby.^[6]

In 2022, he launched a new "sex-positive," queer dating app called Motto with cofounder Alex Hostetler, hoping to regulate the "toxicity" and "discrimination" present on other apps.^{[7][8]} This app ceased operations in September 2024.^{[9][10]}

Early life and education

Simkhai was born in Tel Aviv, Israel. His mother was a jeweler, and his father was a diamond dealer. When Simkhai was three years old, his family moved to New York City.^[11] He then grew up Mamaroneck, New York.^[12] While in high school, he says he dated women; he remarked that he was not being dishonest about his sexuality, but that his "coming out of the closet was a process".^[11] Before coming out, he would frequently seek out gay men to talk to on websites like CompuServe and AOL.^[12]

Simkhai received his Bachelor of Arts degree in International Relations & Economics from Tufts University in May 1998. After starting college, he came out to his parents and friends. He has two brothers, who are also gay.^[1] Simkhai owns several pieces of real estate, but primarily resides in New York.^[13] In 2021, Dave Keuning bought a mansion that Simkhai had owned in Outpost Estates in Los Angeles.^[14]

Business career

After college, Simkhai worked in mergers and acquisitions.^[1] He conceived the idea of the app to answer the need to know "who else around you is also gay".^[11] While he started with little money or expertise,^[15] and never expected Grindr to become international,^[11] he became a multimillionaire

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יואל שמחאי



Simkhai at TechCrunch Disrupt SF 2012

Born	1976 (age 49–50) Tel Aviv, Israel
Education	<u>Tufts University</u>
Occupation	Tech entrepreneur
Known for	Founder and former CEO of <u>Grindr</u> and <u>Blendr</u>

CEO of an app with millions of users worldwide.^[4] Simkhai's early approach in regulating Grindr users was "laissez-faire", trusting the community to "manage itself."^[8] In 2014, Simkhai demonstrated that he was a user of his own app. He ceased including in his profile information regarding his role behind Grindr.^[11] In 2016, Simkhai sold a large stake in the app to the Chinese gaming company Beijing Kunlun Tech.^[16] In January 2018, he left Grindr after the company was fully sold to the latter company.^{[17][18]}

Simkhai is a charter member of the Young Presidents' Organization.^[4]

In 2022, Simkhai launched a mobile app called Motto for the gay and queer community. He labeled it as an attempt to "course correct" away from the negative aspects of already-existing gay dating apps. Simkhai acknowledged the "unintended consequences" of Grindr, including transphobia, sexual racism, and fat-shaming present on the platform. Motto required pictures of users' faces on profiles to encourage positive interactions and identity verification. While this move drew criticism for excluding "down-low" or closeted men, the app was mainly geared toward out Queer people.^[19] The app also only allowed users to interact with ten other profiles per day, attempting to limit users' screen time.^[7] The app then used artificial intelligence to regulate "bad behavior" on the app.^[8] The company was based in New York City, and was initially available only there and in Miami, Florida.^[20] According to its website, the app shut down in September 2024.^[10]

Personal life

Simkhai was based in Los Angeles through 2015. Simkhai is Jewish. He was also diagnosed with dyslexia as a child.^[21]

Simkhai expressed support for both Anderson Cooper and John Browne, as they came out or were outed as gay, calling them "role models."^[12]

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