

Case Study

Giist Social Aims to Detox the Social Media Landscape with Kalix from Lightbend



Giist Social (Giist.social) is a new kind of social media platform. Billed as “a safe place to share, discuss and learn”, it aims to encourage people to produce useful content and engage respectfully with others. Free sign-ups are available by invitation from existing users; people without invitations can join by paying a small one-time fee designed to keep out botnets and troll farms.

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Mauricio Aristizabal,
Founder and CEO, Giist.social

The Need

For many people today, social media has become a byword for toxic interactions and a frontline in the so-called culture wars. While good is being done through globally recognized social platforms, the prevalence of trolls, scammers, and political botnets seems to be tipping the balance toward the negative.

Mauricio Aristizabal, Founder and CEO of Giist Social, says: “For years now, I’ve been unsatisfied with the tenor of the conversation on social media and what that’s doing to society. I had the idea to create a new kind of social media platform, and when Twitter was purchased, I felt I needed to jump in and seize the moment.”

Aristizabal envisioned a social media platform where users could be confident that they are engaging with real people rather than with bots. To this end, the new platform would offer free membership only by invitation from an existing user, plus the option of paid membership. Where other social media platforms use opaque algorithms to push content to users – often the source of controversies around political bias – the new platform would empower users to curate their own views of content, control conversations, and use powerful search tools to find new content.

“At Giist Social, we facilitate better online discourse by enabling people to have conversations free of trolls and bots,” says Aristizabal. “By limiting the number of free interactions, we encourage a more thoughtful and positive approach to social media, and we believe that there will be strong demand for this fresh way of communicating online.”

The Challenge

Giist Social faced the same key challenge as most other startups: To build a working service quickly and at a low cost, without compromising on quality.

“Speed to market was critical, but we also wanted to make the new service robust and massively scalable, for the obvious reason that social media platforms need to accommodate huge numbers of users,” says Aristizabal. “At the same time, we wanted a great deal of flexibility, so that we could rapidly iterate new features and functions in response to user demand.”

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The Solution

Aristizabal chose to build Giist Social using Kalix, Lightbend’s platform-as-a-service offering for building and deploying cloud-native applications and APIs.

“I was so happy when I came across Kalix,” says Aristizabal. “Like – these guys have figured it all out! In terms of what Kalix offered and the whole zero-maintenance concept, it seemed super compelling.”

Kalix helps organizations solve software challenges faster and with less effort by removing the need to focus on boilerplate code and operations. “Kalix removed all of the infrastructure complexity for us. Except for reviewing logs, I haven’t had to interact with GCP at all,” says Aristizabal.

Furthermore, developers can concentrate fully on functional aspects of their applications, leaving Kalix to automatically handle the operational aspects – including seamless scaling and effortless availability.

“As a Scala developer, it was great to see that Kalix offers an SDK for that language,” says Aristizabal. “I like that it’s a polyglot platform: you can write in Scala, Java, or TypeScript, and they’re all equal citizens that run with the exact same APIs and infrastructure.”

He adds: “I wanted something that would scale from the get-go. Kalix is architected to be fully distributed, with no single points of failure or potential bottlenecks, which gives me confidence that we can grow Giist Social as far as users want.”

Aristizabal and his small team started out on the free trial version of Kalix and then upgraded to a paid service with professional support from Lightbend. The team followed Kalix quick start guides and joined online discussion groups for additional help.

“As we got deeper into using Kalix, we started using the support function in the dashboard,” says Aristizabal. “That has worked really well for us; the assistance we get is highly responsive.”

Giist Social aims to give users unprecedented power in slicing and dicing their content, rather than serving up an algorithm-generated personalized feed. In technical terms, this made it vital to be able to run multi-dimensional searches in a very efficient way. “As well as searching by keyword or hashtag, you might want to search by geography, or by author, or by whether it’s a reply or an original post,” says Aristizabal.

Aristizabal chose Singlestore DB as the search engine for Giist Social. “Besides its great performance and extensive featureset, SingleStore fits Kalix perfectly for two reasons,” he says. “First, it easily ingests application events from Kalix via Kafka with their Pipelines function, at no additional cost and without additional middleware to maintain, so integration was a breeze. Second, accessing that data from microservices like Kalix is easy because it can be queried via stateless http Data API, no DB connections or pools needed.”

The Results

Giist Social is now live for invited subscribers, who receive a daily allowance of coins for social interactions. The service rewards active long-term users with more coins – and therefore a more prominent voice on the platform. Users have much more control over conversations than on a typical social media platform and can use the powerful live search capability to see fresh content on a topic in real time. The ability to embargo posts enables users to set up communities of paying subscribers who receive content ahead of the general public.

Using Kalix and SingleStore, Aristizabal and his team were able to focus on developing the functionality of Giist Social without expending significant time and effort on the architecture or non-functional considerations.

“Without Kalix, I would have needed to hire more people and it probably would have taken twice as long to develop the service,” says Aristizabal. “With a new service like this, you really want to get it out there and prove the value without needing to make huge investments. Thanks to Kalix, we could focus on the idea rather than the infrastructure underneath it. And the deployment itself was basically a non-event because that’s the whole power of Kalix: It makes it so simple to take your business logic and just deploy.”

As Giist Social grows its user base, Aristizabal and his team will add new functionality based on user feedback. Here, Kalix’s ease of integration with other services will be a major asset. “Just through a simple configuration, you can integrate with other parts of the cloud ecosystem, which any serious app is going to need to do,” says Aristizabal. “We’re confident that we made the right choice for Giist Social, and we’re looking forward to continuing to build on Kalix.”

Learn more at [Kalix.io](https://kalix.io)