Course ID and Title: DSO 599 – The Battles of Our Digital Ecosystems (Lessons from the Field)
Units: 1.5 Units
Spring 2025—TBD—Time TBD (Meets once per week, for 3 hours in the 1st half of the semester)

Location: TBD

Instructor(s): Jared Earl Grusd
Office: N/A
Office Hours: Upon request
Contact Info: grusd@marshall.usc.edu

Course Description

In today's fast-evolving digital landscape, emerging technologies are driving unprecedented economic growth and reshaping industries at a pace that rivals the Industrial Revolution. The proliferation of technology companies such as Apple, Nvidia, Alphabet, Microsoft, Amazon, Meta, and Netflix has led to the emergence of a robust digital economy that touches every aspect of our lives. As these major players battle for dominance over essential platforms—ranging from cloud computing and mobile ecosystems to AI and quantum computing—an array of start-ups, valued at over a billion dollars, are disrupting traditional business models across the globe.

This course explores into the dynamic and competitive environment of digital ecosystems, focusing on key technological advancements and the strategic interactions between firms. However, what truly sets this course apart is its grounding in the practical, real-world decisions that shape these industries. As both a professor and an executive who has been on the front lines at companies like Google, Spotify, Snapchat, Chime, and Verizon, I will bridge the gap between academic theory and how strategic decisions are made in the fast-paced environments of tech firms. The course will not only cover the foundational tools and frameworks taught in business schools—such as strategy, decision theory, and game theory—but also bring in my first-hand experiences in how those tools translate (or don't) when the stakes are real and the market is moving rapidly.

We will examine how the dynamics of competition, disruption, and innovation play out in real-life boardrooms, providing students with insights into how executives navigate uncertainty, competition, and rapid technological change.

With a multidisciplinary approach that incorporates elements of strategy, finance, economics, and psychology, students will gain a comprehensive understanding of the digital economy. Guest speakers, who are also C-level executives in the industry, will contribute their perspectives on the challenges and opportunities they face. By the end of the course, students will develop confidence in applying their skills to dynamic markets, while fostering deeper insights into how technology shapes the competitive landscape—not just from the classroom but from the real world.

Instructor Bio

Jared is passionate about building transformative businesses that leverage technology to improve society. Currently, he is the co-founder of Ethiqly AI, a venture-backed educational technology company utilizing artificial intelligence to elevate human expression and empowerment. Previously, he held leadership roles at some of the world's most innovative companies--- including serving as Chief Strategy Officer of Snapchat, Chime, and AOL, General Counsel of Spotify, and CEO of HuffPost & SVP of News of Verizon. He also worked as a senior executive

at Google. In addition, Jared co-founded Shake, a legal-tech startup that sold to Legal Shield. He previously served on the boards of Newsela and SoulCycle.

Jared is a thought leader, deeply committed to training future technology leaders, entrepreneurs, and investors. He is a leading professor at Columbia Business School, specializing in corporate strategies for high-growth companies. He also teaches entrepreneurship at the University of Southern California, and the dynamics of high-growth industries at the University of Chicago Law School, where he's a member of the Advisory Council.

Jared's notable contributions have earned him a place in Adweek's Class of Young Influentials, Business Insider's Silicon Alley Top 100 (on three separate occasions), and CNN/Money/Fortune's list of five of Tech's most powerful lawyers. Jared holds an MBA from Columbia Business School, a JD with Honors from the University of Chicago Law School, and a BA from the University of Pennsylvania.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. **Analyze the internal and external factors contributing to the rise and fall of dominant platforms and their competitors**, using both academic frameworks and real-world case studies drawn from major tech companies who are leading the platform battles.
2. **Evaluate the role of leadership, organizational structures, metrics, and stakeholder incentives in shaping the trajectory of high-growth companies (or aspiring startups)**, integrating insights from the instructor's experience in the tech industry and practical examples from guest speakers.
3. **Differentiate between successful strategies employed by unicorns and the common missteps leading to the failure of other companies**, using concrete examples from the competitive digital ecosystem to understand the dynamics of innovation, disruption, and strategic decision-making.
4. **Formulate actionable strategies for business growth by synthesizing insights from case studies, industry challenges, and expert guest perspectives**, bridging classroom learning with the decision-making processes faced by executives in fast-paced tech environments.
5. **Collaborate effectively in team settings to critically assess and present on various company trajectories**, simulating real-world tech environments and decision-making processes to highlight key lessons, strategic takeaways, and the practical application of academic tools.

READING MATERIALS

The reading materials are located in the Appendix to this Syllabus. The materials are subject to change or be supplemented based on current events in order for the course to stay as current as possible with emerging themes. Each week's reading assignments are hyperlinked within the Course Outline for easier access regarding reading requirements for each week.

TECHNOLOGY REQUIRMENTS

You.are responsible for ensuring that you have the necessary computer equipment and reliable internet access. Marshall has site licenses for a variety of software that students can access free of charge. A list of available software is located here. You are invited to explore what lab or loaner options exist. Contact the Marshall HelpDesk (213-740-3000 or HelpDesk@marshall.usc.edu) if you need assistance.

GRADING

Assignments	Points	% of Overall Grade
Class Participation	10	10%
Homework	15	15%
Final Take-Home Project / Exam	30	30%
Team Project	50	45%
TOTAL	100	100%

CLASS PARTICIPATION

Class participation is an extremely important part of the learning experience in this course as the richness of the learning experience will be largely dependent upon the degree of preparation by all.students prior to each class session. Cold calling may take place to encourage active participation and to gain multiple perspectives and points of view, thus lending itself to the richness of the learning experience. In-class participation grading will be based on students' demonstrated willingness to participate, and the quality of the comments expressed, rather than quantity.

While some students are far more comfortable than others with class participation, all.students should make an effort to contribute meaningfully. My expectation and that of your classmates are that you are prepared for all.classes and will actively participate in and meaningfully contribute to class discussions. Further details will provided during the course introduction.

HOMEWORK

Due at the beginning of each class, Students will be expected to do the readings for each week in order to be able to participate meaningfully in the classroom. Every week, students will be asked to write a short reaction response in Brightspace to one to three broad questions designed to encourage the student to reflect and think critically about the subject matter of the next class. Late submissions will result in an automatic deduction of points for the grade.

Students will be expected to turn in 3 of the 6 assignments for a completion grade. They will also be asked to identify their top 2 assignments for a scored grade.

TEAM/GROUP PROJECT

Students will be expected to do a team project which will compromise either a team paper or presentation (powerpoint etc) that responds to one of three prompts that will be provided on the first day of class. The presentations will be due during the final exam period of the course. Team sizes will be dependent on enrollment the course will have no more then 6 members.

EXAMS

The final exam will be a take home exam and open note. Students will have a choice of analyzing a specific case or answering an essay prompt and will be delivered via Brightspace during the final exam period of the course. Similar to homework completed in the course, late submission will result in an automatic deduction in points.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COURSE EVALUATIONS

The student course evaluations are valuable to enable the continuous improvement of the course. Every student will be responsible for providing an evaluation.

USE OF RECORDINGS

Pursuant to the USC.Student.Handbook.(https://policy.usc.edu/studenthandbook/, page 57), students may not record a university class without the express permission of the instructor and announcement to the class. In addition, students may not distribute or use notes or recordings based on USC classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than personal or class-related group study by students registered for the class. This restriction on unauthorized use applies to all information that is distributed or displayed for use in relation to the class. Violation of this policy may subject an individual or entity to university discipline and/or legal proceedings.

COURSE SCHEDULE

The course schedule will be as follows (order and/or topics subject to change):

Unit 1: Frameworks and Lessons from a Road Warrior

- Foundations of Digital Ecosystems and Business Strategy

- Defining Success: Building Flexible Frameworks for Success and Growth

- Compass v Rules: Bridging the Gap between Business School and the Real world

- Observations from Jared's Journey and Principles Learned

Unit 2: The Recent Past

- Personal Computers & Operating Systems

    o Case¿IBM at the Crossroads or Microsoft Antitrust Case

- The Internet: Browser Wars and Search Engines

    o Case¿A Brief History of the Browser Wars

- The Rise and Strategy of Social Networks

    o Case¿Social Media War 2021: Snap vs. Facebook vs. TikTok

Unit 3: The Present (Platforms, Unicorns and Carcasses)

- Transforming Entertainment

    o Choose.one.Case¿

        ▪ Spotify: Face the Music (Update 2021)

        ▪ Apple and the Music Industry

- Quibi: The Next Big Thing

- Netflix

- The Metaverse: Immersive Experiences

  - Case¿Metaverse Wars

- Cloud Wars: AWS vs. Azure vs. Google Cloud

  - Reading¿Cloud Wars Go Global: How Amazon, Microsoft, Google, and Alibaba Compete in Web Services

- The Silicon Backbone: Semiconductor Industry and Chip Wars

  - Case¿Intel or NVIDIA

Unit 5: Failed Ecosystems and The Future

- Beyond Human: AI and Quantum Computing

  - Case¿AI Wars

- Humans: Synthetic Biology

  - Case¿Octant

- The Future of Mobility: Connected Cars and Autonomous Vehicles

  - Case¿Tesla Motors: Disrupting the Auto Industry? or Tesla in 2023: Building a Radically Innovative Operating System

- The Future of Financial Platforms: DeFi, Crypto, and Web 3.0

  - Case¿Coinbase: The Exchange of the Cryptos

Unit 6: Putting It All Together

- Navigating the Global Tech Landscape: Regulation, Policy, and Geopolitical Competition

- Panel Discussion with Industry Experts

- Connecting the Dots: Wrap-Up and Future Trends

Unit 7: Final Presentations

- Written group presentation due at the start of class
- Live group presentation
- Date and Time forthcoming

Green Denotes: Likely Guest Speaker

OPEN EXPRESSION AND RESPECT FOR ALL

An important goal of the educational experience at USC Marshall is to be exposed to and discuss diverse, thought-provoking, and sometimes controversial ideas that challenge one's beliefs. In this course we will support the values articulated in the USC Marshall "Open Expression Statement": (https://www.marshall.usc.edu/open-expression-statement).

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Integrity:

The University of Southern California is a learning community committed to developing successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the dissemination of ideas. Academic misconduct, which includes any act of dishonesty in the production or submission of academic work, compromises the integrity of the person who commits the act and can impugn the perceived integrity of the entire university community. It stands in opposition to the university's mission to research, educate, and contribute productively to our community and the world.

All students are expected to submit assignments that represent their own original work, and that have been prepared specifically for the course or section for which they have been submitted. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s).

Other violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), collusion, knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university. All incidences of academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see the student handbook or the Office of Academic Integrity's website, and university policies on Research and Scholarship Misconduct.

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment, or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Support Systems:

Counseling.and.Mental.Health._(879).306_5900-.80-3on.call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

544Suicide.and.Crisis.Lifeline._544for.both.calls.and.text.messages.-.80-3on.call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to

remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

Relationship.and.Sexual.Violence.Prevention.Services.(RSVP)._(879).306_5911(WELL).- .80–3.on.call.Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

Office.for.Equity?Equal.Opportunity?and.Title.IX.(EEO_TIX)._(879).306_1642

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting.Incidents.of.Bias.or.Harassment._(879).306_1642.or.(879).487_4364

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The.Office.of.Student.Accessibility.Services.(OSAS)._(879).306_6332

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

USC.Campus.Support.and.Intervention._(879).306_6077

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity?Equity.and.Inclusion._(879).306_8767

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC.Emergency._UPC¿(879).306_0987?HSC¿(989).008_7666.- .80–3.on.call

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC.Department.of.Public.Safety._UPC¿(879).306_2666?HSC¿(989).008_7866.- .80–3.on.call

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Office.of.the.Ombuds._(879).487_6112(UPC).—(989_008_6943.(HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

Occupational.Therapy.Faculty.Practice._(989).008_8416.or.otfp@med.usc.edu

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.

Readings:

1. **McGrath, Rita Gunther, and Alex Gourlay.** The.End.of.Competitive.Advantage¿How.to.Keep.Your.Strategy.Moving. as.Fast.as.Your.Business¡.Harvard Business Review Press, 2013. ISBN: 978-1422172810.

2. *Vroom, Govert, Isaac Sastre Boquet, and Abhishek Deshmane.* Spotify¿Face.the.Music.(Update.8687)¡

   IESE Business School, 2021. Product Number: IES869-PDF-ENG.

3. **Crossan, Mary M., and Ken Mark.** Apple.and.the.Music.Industry¡.Ivey Publishing, 2020. Product Number: W20374-PDF-ENG.

4. **Yoffie, David B., and Daniel Fisher.** Social.Media.War.8687¿Snap.vs¡.Facebook.vs¡.TikTok¡.Harvard Business School, 2021 (Revised 2024). Product Number: 721443-PDF-ENG.

5. **Wu, Andy, Matt Higgins, Miaomiao Zhang, and Hang Jiang.** AI.Wars¡.Harvard Business School, 2023 (Revised 2024). Product Number: 723434-PDF-ENG.

6. **Wu, Andy, David B. Yoffie, and Matt Higgins.** Metaverse.Wars¡.Harvard Business School, 2023. Product Number: 723431-PDF-ENG.

7. **Soregaroli, Cameron, and Eric Janssen.** Quibi¿The.Failure.of.Hollywood"s»Next.Big.Thing‹¡.Ivey Publishing, 2021. Product Number: W25417-PDF-ENG.

8. **Gulati, Ranjay, Allison M. Ciechanover, and Jeff Huizinga.** Netflix¿A.Creative.Approach.to.Culture.and.Agility¡. Harvard Business School, 2019. Product Number: 420055-PDF-ENG.

9. **Corts, Kenneth, and Debbie Freier.** Brief.History.of.the.Browser.Wars¡.Harvard Business School, 2003. Product Number: 703517-PDF-ENG.

10. **Duke, Lisa, and Julian Birkinshaw.** The.Rise.and.Fall.of.Nokia¡.London Business School, 2011. Product Number: LBS152-PDF-ENG.

11. **Edelman, Benjamin, and Thomas R. Eisenmann.** Google.Inc¡.Harvard Business School, 2010 (Revised 2011). Product Number: 910036-PDF-ENG.

12. **Rothaermel, Frank T.** IBM.at.the.Crossroads¡.McGraw-Hill Education, 2015. Product Number: MH0036- PDF-ENG.

13. **Casadesus-Masanell, Ramon, David B. Yoffie, and Sasha Mattu.** Intel.Corp¡-7⟨524⟩_8669¡.Harvard Business School, 2002 (Revised 2010). Product Number: 703427-PDF-ENG.

14. **Dann, Jeremy, and Robert Holmen.** Elemental.Technologies¿The.Nvidia.Strategic.Investment¡.USC Marshall School of Business, 2014. Product Number: SCG505-PDF-ENG.

15. **Davis, Jason P., and Anne Yang.** Cloud.Wars.Go.Global¿How.Amazon?Microsoft?Google.and.Alibaba.Compete.in. Web.Services¡.INSEAD, 2020. Product Number: IN1658-PDF-ENG.

16. *Wells, John R., Benjamin Weinstock, Galen Danskin, and Gabriel Ellsworth.* Amazon¡com?8687¡.Harvard Business School, 2015 (Revised 2021). Product Number: 716402-PDF-ENG.

17. **Dyer, Jeff, and Nathan R. Furr.** Tesla.Motors¿Disrupting.the.Auto.Industry?.INSEAD, 2013 (Revised 2019). Product Number: IN1137-PDF-ENG.

18. *Burgelman, Robert, and Raj Joshi.* Tesla.In.8689¿Building.A.Radically.Innovative.Operating.System¡

   Stanford Graduate School of Business, 2023. Product Number: SM372-PDF-ENG.

19. **Di Maggio, Marco, and Wenyao Sha.** Coinbase¿The.Exchange.of.the.Cryptos¡.Harvard Business School, 2021. Product Number: 222044-PDF-ENG.

20. **Casadesus-Masanell, Ramon, David B. Yoffie, and Sasha Mattu.** Intel.Corp¡-7⊙⊘⊘_8669¡.Harvard Business School, 2002 (Revised 2010). Product Number: 703427-PDF-ENG.

21. **Dann, Jeremy, and Robert Holmen.** Elemental.Technologies¿The.Nvidia.Strategic.Investment¡.USC Marshall School of Business, 2014. Product Number: SCG505-PDF-ENG.

22. **Davis, Jason P., and Anne Yang.** Cloud.Wars.Go.Global¿How.Amazon?Microsoft?Google.and.Alibaba.Compete.in. Web.Services¡.INSEAD, 2020. Product Number: IN1658-PDF-ENG.

23. **Wells, John R., Benjamin Weinstock, Galen Danskin, and Gabriel Ellsworth.** Amazon¡com?8687¡

Harvard Business School, 2015 (Revised 2021). Product Number: 716402-PDF-ENG.

24. **Dyer, Jeff, and Nathan R. Furr.** Tesla.Motors¿Disrupting.the.Auto.Industry?.INSEAD, 2013 (Revised 2019). Product Number: IN1137-PDF-ENG.

25. **Burgelman, Robert, and Raj Joshi.** Tesla.In.8689¿Building.A.Radically.Innovative.Operating.System¡

Stanford Graduate School of Business, 2023. Product Number: SM372-PDF-ENG.

26. **Di Maggio, Marco, and Wenyao Sha.** Coinbase¿The.Exchange.of.the.Cryptos¡.Harvard Business School, 2021. Product Number: 222044-PDF-ENG.

How DSO 599 Contributes to Marshall Graduate Program Learning Goals

Marshall Graduate Program Learning Goals	DSO 599 Objectives that support this goal	Assessment Method*
Learning Goal #1: Develop Personal Strengths. **Our graduates will develop a global and entrepreneurial mindset, lead with integrity, purpose and ethical perspective, and draw value from diversity and inclusion.**		
1.1 Possess personal integrity and a commitment to an organization's purpose and core values.		
1.2 Expand awareness with a global and entrepreneurial mindset, drawing value from diversity and inclusion.	Learning Objective 1	Class Participation, Individual Papers
1.3 Exhibit awareness of ethical dimensions and professional standards in decision making.		
Learning Goal #2: Gain Knowledge and Skills. **Our graduates will develop a deep understanding of the key functions of business enterprises and will be able to identify and take advantage of opportunities in a complex, uncertain and dynamic business environment using critical and analytical thinking skills.**		
2.1 Gain knowledge of the key functions of business enterprises.	Learning Objective 3	Papers and Group project
2.2 Acquire advanced skills to understand and analyze significant business opportunities, which can be complex, uncertain and dynamic.	Learning Objective 1	Papers and Group project
2.3 Use critical and analytical thinking to identify viable options that can create short-term and long-term value for organizations and their stakeholders.	Learning Objective 2	All graded assignments
Learning Goal #3: Motivate and Build High Performing Teams. **Our graduates will achieve results by fostering collaboration, communication and adaptability on individual, team, and organization levels.**		
3.1 Motivate and work with colleagues, partners, and other stakeholders to achieve organizational purposes.	Learning Objective 4	Group project
3.2 Help build and sustain high-performing teams by infusing teams with a variety of perspectives, talents, and skills and aligning individual success with team success and with overall organizational success.	Learning Objective 4	Group project
3.3 Foster collaboration, communication and adaptability in helping organizations excel in a changing business landscape.	Learning Objective 4	Group project