

# Without Their Permission Summary

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**1-Sentence-Summary:** *Without Their Permission* is Reddit co-founder Alexis Ohanian's plea to you to start something, as he lays out how anyone can use the internet to shape the future of the 21st century without having to get a yes from somebody else first.

**Read in:** 4 minutes

**Favorite quote from the author:**



For the longest time I hated Reddit. I really did. Whenever I went there to post something, I'd always get bashed. I'm very much into personal development, plus I have a pretty positive attitude about things, which means if I see something that I think might help me, I get optimistic about it and just give it a go.

But that doesn't wash with Redditors. They're like scientists. They want to know *why* something is supposed to work. They want the data, the research, the facts and of course, the proper sources for your arguments. They hate spam and meaningless blubber. They're deep thinkers.

Earlier this year, I realized it wasn't Reddit that was bad. It was just me not helping the community in a good way. So I changed. I started posting really interesting things I found out while creating my motivational books list, and dug deeper. Since then, I've had some great discussions, especially in the "Today I Learned" subreddit (this one really took off) and can now rely on their critical feedback when I need it, just as they can rely on me posting valuable and interesting things.

This book is a behind-the-scenes look at the fascinating story of how Reddit came to be, written by none other than one of the co-founders himself: Alexis Ohanian. He draws valuable lessons about the social power of the internet and what we need to thrive in the future.

Here are 3 lessons from *Without Their Permission* to help you bring your own internet startup to

life:

1. All startups have to solve a real problem, but it doesn't have to be a well-known one.
2. The internet can amplify anything, so be careful what you put out.
3. We have to fight to keep the internet open and uncensored.

## Lesson 1: Your startup must solve a real problem – but it doesn't have to be a well-known one.

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This is the first thing any startup book teaches you, so I'm not gonna go too deep into it, but Alexis really made an interesting point about this. Noah Kagan calls it "Engineer's Disease." What it means is that most people starting a business (and engineers are especially prone to this, hence the term) do it in the following order:

1. Build a product you think people will like.
2. Go out the door, wave it around and ask: "Who wants this?"

And then they get sad when no one wants to buy this awesome thing they've spent months building. Here's what people like Noah and Alexis say you should do instead: **Talk to potential customers first**, figure out what problems they already have and *then* build something that helps them solve those problems!

Now here comes the interesting part: **the real-world problem you're solving does not have to be a well-known problem at all.**

For example, a father and son duo from Australia invented a way to get honey from their beehives without having to open it and tranquilize the bees. Thanks to their simple system the honey just flows out, literally on tap. Not a pretty common problem – yet it managed to gather over \$13 million on IndieGoGo, a crowdfunding platform.

Forget about billion dollar markets or reaching 1 in 7 people on the planet, like Facebook (even they started with just college campuses). **Focus on a problem that's personal, close to you, and is unique to a small group of people, and you'll do just fine.**

## Lesson 2: The internet can amplify anything over night, so be careful what you put out.

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In 2007, Greenpeace started a campaign to track a whale via satellite, to bring awareness to Japanese fishers still hunting these creatures and protest against an expedition set out to hunt down 50 whales. To engage their activists, Greenpeace held a poll to name the whale. Among the many majestic name suggestions with deep meanings, such as Aiko, Libertad, Mira, Kaimana and Aurora was also one rather fun submission: Mr. Splashy Pants.

When the poll ended up on Reddit somehow, the community ended up voting for the name 20,000 times – and it won by a landslide. You'd think this is stupid, but Mr. Splashy Pants ended up generating so much media coverage, that the Japanese government ended up canceling the humpback hunt.

**The internet has the power to amplify anything at will, so be careful what you put out .**

For example Youtuber PewDiePie caused real trouble for John Scarce on Twitter, by using his following to get a bet to 1000 re-tweets – now Scarce has to do something REALLY stupid.

## Lesson 3: It's on us to fight to keep the internet an open and uncensored space.

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All of this, the good and the bad, rests upon one condition: that the internet is a democratic, free, open, uncensored space. Ohanian says we have to fight and exercise our rights to keep it that way, for otherwise we risk losing all of this tremendous power.

For example, in 2011, US Congress tried to pass the SOPA – Stop Online Piracy Act – which would have given private parties the power to just shut down websites at will. No notification, no judicial hearing.

To fight this unprecedented censorship, Ohanian himself started lobbying against the bill. After all, **censorship like this would rob others of the opportunity to do what he has done: change the world and liberate himself by making money in the process.**

On January 18th, 2012, the world spoke up. Called Internet Blackout Day, some of the most powerful websites, like Wikipedia, Reddit and Google shut down entirely, taking the last wind out of the bill supporters' sails. SOPA didn't make it through Congress, but we'll have to keep fighting for our internet freedom in the future.

## Without Their Permission Review

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Pay attention to the details here. The core process Alexis talks about for funding a startup is similar to what you might know from other books, but it's in his nuanced views on issues like censorship and which problems to tackle that you can find entirely new lessons about what it takes to run a business.

Especially if you're afraid of what other people will think, *Without Their Permission* will be a good kick in the butt to get going anyway!

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## What else can you learn from the blinks?

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- Why none of your users will care about perfection and neither should you
- The number one reason startups fail
- What social currency is and why it's important
- How DonorsChoose.org was started
- Why you don't have to win a contest to get your own TV show

## Who would I recommend the Without Their Permission summary to?

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The 15 year old, who's on all social media, but still not producing her own, legitimate stream of content, the 37 year old engineer, who once built something that failed and now is afraid to try again, and anyone who hasn't heard about SOPA.