

**Disrupt You!**

# **What's in it for me? Stop waiting for success to strike.**

You may think that the world's best entrepreneurs are lucky – but you'd be wrong. Rather than waiting around for success to strike, true disruptors take action. Day by day, they carefully observe the world around them to pinpoint proven problems and produce powerful solutions. They don't always get it right on the first try – or even the second, third, or fourth. But that doesn't faze them, because failure is their first step to success. These entrepreneurs aren't lucky – they're logical. And with the right insights, following in their footsteps is easier than you might expect. In these blinks, you'll learn

how to identify promising business ideas; why data is key to driving disruption; and where many entrepreneurs go wrong

## **The best entrepreneurs find opportunity in failure.**

What's the first thing you do after stepping inside an airport? Whether you're in Canada or China, Norway or New Zealand, chances are you approach a check-in kiosk. You don't want to stand in line, so instead you get a machine to issue your boarding pass. Today, such kiosks are found in almost every country across the world. But these machines weren't always a success. In fact, they're actually a symbol of failure. The inventor of airport kiosks didn't intend for his machines to be used in the travel industry at all. Instead, he wanted them to sell lottery tickets. That idea was a total flop. But in failure, the inventor saw something many people didn't: opportunity. And so, he pivoted – abandoning his original concept and applying kiosk technology to the travel industry. The key message here is: The best entrepreneurs find opportunity in failure. That entrepreneur was the author, Jay Samit. That failed lottery machine set him on the path of serial innovation and taught him to reframe rejections as redirections. There's a saying that entrepreneurs are simply those who understand that there is little difference between obstacle and opportunity. Take one look at Samit's career trajectory and this immediately rings true. Unfazed by setbacks, Samit is now a globally renowned expert in entrepreneurship – having collaborated with Fortune 500 companies, foreign governments, and even the Vatican to drive disruption in countless industries. Some people might look at the author and call him lucky. But his kiosk success was born from logic – not luck. After striking out with the lottery idea, he became introspective. He asked: Is there another potential application for this technology? Where others might have thrown in the towel, he saw failure as part of the process, and came back with an even better idea than before. The good news? While luck can't be learned, logic can. These blinks will draw on insights from some of history's greatest innovators to provide you with a blueprint for entrepreneurial success. You'll get the most important tools you'll need to transform fledgling ideas into fully formed innovations. Ready to set your path to entrepreneurial success? Let's get started.

## **When everybody's looking right, look left.**

In the early 1990s, computers were still fairly new. Countless entrepreneurs were competing in a race to monetize technological innovation. Who wound up winning, you might ask? The last person you'd expect. The first start-up to sell for \$100 million during that era wasn't a software or hardware company. It wasn't launched by a coding connoisseur. In fact, its founder, Billy Myers, didn't even know how to use a computer. And he didn't need to. As a born entrepreneur, Billy drove disruption by straying from the status quo. While others waxed lyrical about processor speed or storage space, he took a completely fresh, left-field look at what was happening around him. Here's the key message: When everybody's looking right, look left. That's when inspiration struck. People were paying \$2,000 for personal computers – but they didn't have anything to protect their investments. Determined to change that, Billy began producing plastic dust covers for computer monitors, processing units, keyboards and other accessories. Ever used a mouse pad or floppy disc case? You can thank Billy for those inventions, too. These products cost him almost nothing to make. In an era of high-tech entrepreneurship, they were stupid-simple. But that didn't matter. What did matter was that Billy was the first to identify a fledgling need. While everyone else was looking one way, he looked the other. Wondering how you can achieve similar success? Fortunately, it's not as difficult as it sounds. In fact, “eureka” ideas are fairly easy to come by – as long as you're keeping your eyes and ears open. To get your creativity flowing, the author suggests completing a daily exercise. Every morning, jot down three things you notice that could be improved about the world around you. For example, you might ask: Which processes are inefficient? How many products don't work as well as they should? Is there anything I dread doing each day – and, if so, what invention might fix that? The exercise will be easy at first. But, over time, it will get progressively harder. And that will force you to pay even closer attention to your surroundings. If you ever find yourself avoiding the exercise, just remember: today's observation could be tomorrow's fortune. One idea is all it takes.

## **If the market doesn't love your invention, you'll never make money.**

Of course, having a lightbulb moment is just the beginning. Upon closer inspection, many ideas – even “million-dollar” ones – aren't so fantastic after all. That brings us to another valuable lesson: When something stinks, kick it to the curb. Once upon a time, there was a website called Tune In Hook Up. Ever heard of it? Didn't think so. The site aimed to disrupt the world of online dating, but was a flop. While most dating sites featured images of prospective partners, this one showcased videos instead. The founders thought their idea would make millions. They were wrong. The key message is this: If the market doesn't love your invention, you'll never make money. Turns out, consumers didn't care about using videos for dating. However, data showed that they did love watching videos – just not in this context. And so the site's founders pivoted. They scrapped their original dating site concept and launched a free video-sharing platform. Its name? YouTube. After just one year in business, YouTube was acquired by Google for well over one and a half billion dollars – and the founders' lives changed forever. This may sound like a one-in-a-million story. But flipped failures are more common than you might think. Successful entrepreneurs are masters of evolution, constantly iterating until they find something customers really need. Take Instagram, for example. In 2010, it launched as a mobile check-in app. But before long, data showed that users were obsessing over one feature in particular: photo sharing. With that, the founders ditched their original concept and created the billion-dollar photo-

sharing app we all know today. The bottom line? As an entrepreneur, you need to drop bad business concepts – and fast. Many people are so keen on their original idea that they ignore red flags in an attempt to “make it work” – even when walking away and starting fresh would be the most sensible option. Successful entrepreneurs, on the other hand, know when to call it quits. Data has a permanent seat on their board of directors – and when it speaks, they listen. So next time emotion encroaches on logic, let data drive your decision-making process – or risk staying wed to a bad idea . . . till death do you part.

## **Successful businesses sell solutions, not products.**

What is a cell phone? No, this isn't a question from Jeopardy – and yes, it does sound absurd. But don't brush it off just yet. When you purchase a new cell phone, are you buying a palm-sized piece of metal? Or are you buying a way of connecting with people across the globe? Of course, the answer is obvious. You're not purchasing a physical object, but rather the possibilities it unlocks. You're buying the ability to call friends and family at any time. You're investing in communication, community, and comfort – which are all far more valuable than just some metal and plastic. That brings us to our next lesson: Successful businesses don't sell products; they sell solutions. Take toothpaste, for example. Do people buy it over and over again because they love the product itself? No. They buy it because they love the solution to the problem of halitosis and tooth decay: minty-fresh breath and clean teeth. The key message here is: Successful businesses sell solutions, not products. Following that same logic, the \$1 billion GPS software company Waze doesn't just offer drivers smart maps. Rather, it gives them time – minutes or even hours are saved by taking the quickest route from A to B. Look closely at any successful company, and you'll see that they are mass-producers of solutions. For them, it's never about the products as such, no matter how snazzy. It's always about the promise of what those products can do. Mattress companies sell comfort. Skydiving companies sell adventure. Dating apps sell love. So whether you're pitching to investors or writing web copy for consumers, keep your company's unique solutions front and center. They are your competitive advantage; they're the reason people will keep coming back for more. And whatever you do, steer clear of nonexistent problems. Nobody wants to be sold sand in a desert. If you're offering a solution to a problem that isn't really there, you'll have no customers, no profits – and, eventually, no business. Stay grounded in reality, and move on as soon as your company stops solving real problems for real people. For twenty-first century companies, constant innovation isn't optional; it's an organizational imperative. Businesses can either disrupt or be disrupted – take your pick.

## **Minor risks can lead to major rewards.**

In 2010, a young copywriter named Alec Brownstein was dying to move up in the advertising industry. He dreamed of working for some of New York's top creative directors. He wanted to brainstorm for world-class clients – to brush shoulders with brilliant innovators. But there was a problem. None of those people knew Brownstein even existed. While googling creative directors one day, Alec had a crazy idea. Everybody googles themselves, he thought. So why would my idols be any different? With that, Alec bid for sponsored ads linked to his favorite creative directors' names.

What came next was priceless. Whenever one of those creative directors typed his name into Google, a message popped up saying, “Googling yourself is a lot of fun. Hiring me is fun, too” – and this message led directly to Alec’s website. The result? Eighty percent of Alec’s target audience called him – and two of the directors made him job offers. Here’s the key message: Minor risks can lead to major rewards. For entrepreneurs everywhere, the call to action is clear: Be bold. Take risks. Stand out. You have nothing to lose, and everything to gain. As Alec puts it, “The people who you want to work for can’t hire you any less than they already are. So shoot for the moon.” When you’re chasing career growth, it’s important to surround yourself with fellow dreamers, doers, and disruptors. In the words of billionaire LinkedIn cofounder Reid Hoffman, “The fastest way to change yourself is to hang out with people who are already the way you want to be.” Take this advice to heart, follow in Alec’s footsteps, and find your own creative way to connect with prospective mentors. For example, the author once received a spaghetti colander and bag of dates in the mail from someone who wanted to “put a date on his calendar” – reinforcing the notion that creativity comes in all forms, and bold moves get noticed. We live in an era of opportunity, where you can reach out to anyone, anywhere, at any time. Use that to your advantage. After all, what’s the worst that can happen? You may never receive a response. And the best? Everything can change – and then you’ll be the one people mention in books ten years from now.

## **Stop promising yourself that you’ll do it tomorrow.**

So what have we learned thus far? First of all, the best entrepreneurs aren’t lucky; they’re logical. Second, they make a career of straying from the status quo, always keeping their ears and eyes open for new opportunities. Third, they listen to the market – and aren’t afraid to scrap an old idea that has stopped working. Fourth, they don’t sell products; they sell solutions. Fifth, they make bold moves – recognizing that a series of minor risks can add up to a major reward. There’s one more thing successful entrepreneurs have in common: they move fast. And you should do the same. The key message is this: Stop promising yourself that you’ll do it tomorrow. Think about your goals, then set deadlines for each of them and work backward to time the steps you need to take. How might this work? Here’s an example. In 1987, a struggling actor named Jim Carrey wrote himself a check for \$10 million, dated for Thanksgiving 1995. In 1994 – one year ahead of schedule – Jim made \$10 million for his leading role in the movie *Dumb & Dumber*. By putting the pressure on and working tirelessly toward his goal, he’d quickly propelled himself down the path to his dream career. Of course, not everyone will get to be a multimillionaire. But no matter how big or small your goal is, the most important thing is to set it in the first place. Excuses are easy. Effort is not. And yet, it’s the only way to achieve real progress. Don’t fall into the trap of believing something will happen “in due time.” If you really want to make your dreams come true, you need to start working on them. Right now. There’s only one caveat: while you’re steaming at full speed toward tomorrow, don’t miss today. At every stage of your career, it’s important to keep an open mind – because opportunities may appear when you least expect them. For proof of that final point, let’s take a quick trip to one of America’s most prestigious college campuses. It was February 2004, and Harvard undergraduate Mark Zuckerberg invited five friends over to his dorm room. He wanted to pitch them a new business idea. Only two out of those five people showed up. Today, both are billionaires – because they were present. Instead of studying from a textbook that day, they witnessed Facebook being formed in real-time. And the rest was – quite literally –

history. So go out and search for solutions. Fall in love with different business concepts – and abandon them if they no longer work. Fail forward. And when opportunity comes knocking, always open the door.

## Final summary

The key message in these blinks: Success in business depends on logic, not luck. Through constant reflection and redirection, entrepreneurs drive disruption across industries and around the world. They search for real problems, and sell solutions. Of course, not every idea they have is golden. But when these entrepreneurs do fail, they always fail forward – quickly scrapping bad business concepts, identifying new opportunities, and using data to improve their decision-making process. Actionable advice: Train your brain for success. Every morning, take five minutes to visualize your goals coming to fruition. Not only will this exercise put you in a positive mindset – it'll also bring you one step closer to success, mentally preparing you to build the future you've envisioned. Got feedback? We'd love to hear what you think about our content! Just drop an email to [email protected] with Disrupt You! as the subject line, and share your thoughts!