

Kickstarter was in its infancy.¹ They thought it'd be a good way to introduce the global web community to their idea. Their goal was to raise \$1,500, but in twenty days they got over \$14,000. They realized their idea had the potential to be something much bigger.

They created a platform where symbols and icons could be uploaded, and Edward began recruiting talented designers to contribute their designs, a process he describes as a relatively easy sell. Lots of designers have old drawings just gathering "digital dust" on their hard drives. It's easy to convince them to finally share them with the world.

The Noun Project currently has about seven thousand designers from around the world. But not all submissions are accepted. The Noun Project's quality-review process means that only the best works become part of its collection. They make sure to provide encouraging, constructive feedback whenever they reject a piece of work, which maintains and builds the relationship they have with their global community of designers.

Creative Commons is an integral part of the Noun Project's business model; this decision was inspired by Chris Anderson's book *Free: The Future of Radical Price*, which introduced Edward to the idea that you could build a business model around free content.

Edward knew he wanted to offer a *free* visual language while still providing some protection and reward for its contributors. There is a tension between those two goals, but for Edward, Creative Commons licenses bring this idealism and business opportunity together elegantly. He chose the Attribution (CC BY) license, which means people can download the icons for free and modify them and even use them commercially. The requirement to give attribution to the original creator ensures that the creator can build a reputation and get global recognition for their work. And if they simply want to offer an icon that people can use without hav-

ing to give credit, they can use CC0 to put the work into the public domain.

Noun Project's business model and means of generating revenue have evolved significantly over time. Their initial plan was to sell T-shirts with the icons on it, which in retrospect Edward says was a horrible idea. They did get a lot of email from people saying they loved the icons but asking if they could pay a fee instead of giving attribution. Ad agencies (among others) wanted to keep marketing and presentation materials clean and free of attribution statements. For Edward, "That's when our lightbulb went off."

They asked their global network of designers whether they'd be open to receiving modest remuneration instead of attribution. Designers saw it as a win-win. The idea that you could offer your designs for free and have a global audience *and* maybe even make some money was pretty exciting for most designers.

The Noun Project first adopted a model whereby using an icon without giving attribution would cost \$1.99 per icon. The model's second iteration added a subscription component, where there would be a monthly fee to access a certain number of icons—ten, fifty, a hundred, or five hundred. However, users didn't like these hard-count options. They preferred to try out many similar icons to see which worked best before eventually choosing the one they wanted to use. So the Noun Project moved to an unlimited model, whereby users have unlimited access to the whole library for a flat monthly fee. This service is called NounPro and costs \$9.99 per month. Edward says this model is working well—good for customers, good for creators, and good for the platform.

Customers then began asking for an application-programming interface (API), which would allow Noun Project icons and symbols to be directly accessed from within other applications. Edward knew that the icons and symbols would be valuable in a lot of different