

# INTRODUCTION

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This book shows the world how sharing can be good for business—but with a twist.

We began the project intending to explore how creators, organizations, and businesses make money to sustain what they do when they share their work using Creative Commons licenses. Our goal was not to identify a formula for business models that use Creative Commons but instead gather fresh ideas and dynamic examples that spark new, innovative models and help others follow suit by building on what already works. At the onset, we framed our investigation in familiar business terms. We created a blank “open business model canvas,” an interactive online tool that would help people design and analyze their business model.

Through the generous funding of Kickstarter backers, we set about this project first by identifying and selecting a diverse group of creators, organizations, and businesses who use Creative Commons in an integral way—what we call being **Made with Creative Commons**. We interviewed them and wrote up their stories. We analyzed what we heard and dug deep into the literature.

But as we did our research, something interesting happened. Our initial way of framing the work did not match the stories we were hearing.

Those we interviewed were not typical businesses selling to consumers and seeking to maximize profits and the bottom line. Instead, they were sharing to make the world a better place, creating relationships and community around the works being shared, and generating revenue not for unlimited growth but to sustain the operation.

They often didn’t like hearing what they do described as an open business model. Their endeavor was something more than that. Something different. Something that generates not just economic value but social and cultural value. Something that involves human connection. Being **Made with Creative Commons** is not “business as usual.”

We had to rethink the way we conceived of this project. And it didn’t happen overnight. From the fall of 2015 through 2016, we documented our thoughts in blog posts on *Medium* and with regular updates to our Kickstarter backers. We shared drafts of case studies and analysis with our Kickstarter cocreators, who provided invaluable edits, feedback, and advice. Our thinking changed dramatically over the course of a year and a half.

Throughout the process, the two of us have often had very different ways of understanding and describing what we were learning. Learning from each other has been one of the great joys of this work, and, we hope, something that has made the final product much richer than it ever could have been if either of us undertook this project alone. We have preserved our voices throughout, and you’ll be able to sense our different but complementary approaches as you read through our different sections.

While we recommend that you read the book from start to finish, each section reads more or less independently. The book is structured into two main parts.

Part one, the overview, begins with a big-picture framework written by Paul. He provides some historical context for the digital commons, describing the three ways society