

Use CC to grow a larger audience

Putting a Creative Commons license on your content won't make it automatically go viral, but eliminating legal barriers to copying the work certainly can't hurt the chances that your work will be shared. The CC license symbolizes that sharing is welcome. It can act as a little tap on the shoulder to those who come across the work—a nudge to copy the work if they have any inkling of doing so. All things being equal, if one piece of content has a sign that says Share and the other says Don't Share (which is what "©" means), which do you think people are more likely to share?

The Conversation is an online news site with in-depth articles written by academics who are experts on particular topics. All of the articles are CC-licensed, and they are copied and re-shared on other sites by design. This proliferating effect, which they track, is a central part of the value to their academic authors who want to reach as many readers as possible.

The idea that more eyeballs equates with more success is a form of the *max strategy*, adopted by Google and other technology companies. According to Google's Eric Schmidt, the idea is simple: "Take whatever it is you are doing and do it at the max in terms of distribution. The other way of saying this is that since marginal cost of distribution is free, you might as well put things everywhere."¹⁶ This strategy is what often motivates companies to make their products and services free (i.e., no cost), but the same logic applies to making content freely shareable. Because CC-licensed content is free (as in cost) *and* can be freely copied, CC licensing makes it even more accessible and likely to spread.

If you are successful in reaching more users, readers, listeners, or other consumers of your work, you can start to benefit from the bandwagon effect. The simple fact that there are other people consuming or following your work spurs others to want to do the same.¹⁷ This is, in part, because we simply have a tendency to engage in herd behavior, but it is also because a large following is at least a partial indicator of quality or usefulness.¹⁸

Use CC to get attribution and name recognition

Every Creative Commons license requires that credit be given to the author, and that reusers supply a link back to the original source of the material. CC0, not a license but a tool used to put work in the public domain, does not make attribution a legal requirement, but many communities still give credit as a matter of best practices and social norms. In fact, it is social norms, rather than the threat of legal enforcement, that most often motivate people to provide attribution and otherwise comply with the CC license terms anyway. This is the mark of any well-functioning community, within both the marketplace and the society at large.¹⁹ CC licenses reflect a set of wishes on the part of creators, and in the vast majority of circumstances, people are naturally inclined to follow those wishes. This is particularly the case for something as straightforward and consistent with basic notions of fairness as providing credit.

The fact that the name of the creator follows a CC-licensed work makes the licenses an important means to develop a reputation or, in corporate speak, a brand. The drive to associate your name with your work is not just based on commercial motivations, it is fundamental to authorship. Knowledge Unlatched is a non-profit that helps to subsidize the print production of CC-licensed academic texts by pooling contributions from libraries around the United States. The CEO, Frances Pinter, says that the Creative Commons license on the works has a huge value to authors because reputation is the most important currency for academics. Sharing with CC is a way of having the most people see and cite your work.

Attribution can be about more than just receiving credit. It can also be about establishing provenance. People naturally want to know where content came from—the source of a work is sometimes just as interesting as the work itself. Opendesk is a platform for furniture designers to share their designs. Consumers who like those designs can then get matched with local makers who turn the de-