



Viktor Kirilov &lt;vik.kirilov@gmail.com&gt;

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**YC Winter 2021 Application Submitted**

1 message

**Y Combinator** <apply@ycombinator.com>

Wed, Sep 23, 2020 at 4:21 PM

To: vik.kirilov@gmail.com

Cc: anton.v.georgiev@gmail.com, dimitroff.nikola@gmail.com

Hello **onqtam**,

Your Y Combinator Winter 2021 application for unpinch has been submitted for review. Though reviewers may start looking at your application right away, you can continue to edit your application until the application deadline (Sep 23, 8PM PT).

We've included the text of your application below.

Thanks,  
YC

<https://www.ycombinator.com/apply>

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**COMPANY****Company name:**

unpinch

**Company url, if any:**

<https://unpinch.io/>

**If you have a demo, what's the url? Demo can be anything that shows us how the product works. Usually that's a video or screen recording.**

(Please don't password protect it; just use an obscure url.)

<https://unpinch.io/>

**Describe what your company does in 50 characters or less.**

Comments & annotations on the timeline of podcasts

**What is your company going to make? Please describe your product and what it does or will do.**

Unpinch will allow users to comment, interact & annotate at specific points in time of audio (& video) content. It is a generic interface but will initially focus on podcasts because of the low barrier to entry and the biggest need (because of the length and depth of information prime for indexing & discussion).

The most important part will be the media player - 2 interactive timelines (1 for the whole episode and 1 for the zoomed-in range (zoomline) - hence the "unpinch" name - the gesture for

zooming) and they will allow for precise interactions - think Reddit comments (or StackExchange Q&A), but with the ability to stick them to specific points in time of the content. The idea is to make the experience more social, to foster and aggregate the discussion which currently happens on different platforms, to infuse it with context (because often comments address something specific within the episode and not the entire thing), and to crowdsource the annotation/tagging because that is hard to do properly with speech-to-text services & ML. This would address a wide range of problems customers are currently facing - most of them are outlined with lots of detail in the "What's new about what you're making?" section.

== Here is a full list of features:

- commenting at specific points in time with threading, replies & filtering
- bookmarking specific moments
- sharing links to specific ranges of the content - the audio/video version of quotes but without having to re-upload it & lose the context. This comes naturally because of the resizable window/range mechanic of the timeline & zoomline - right-click (or hold on mobile) and "copy link". Something like this (stock chart zoomed for specific range): <https://prnt.sc/ulrd36>
- crowd-sourced annotation/tagging of the content (topics, agenda (show notes), referenced external resources, people, etc)
- reactions (when a full-blown comment is too much) - "I agree", "WoW", "I call BS!"
- visualizing user activity on the timeline with histograms (highlights) - where are most of the comments/reactions/controversy/questions/external references/time spent/dropoff rate/etc. - for easier navigation - people love data, statistics & graphs (or at least we do!)
- embedding on the websites of specific podcasts - just like Disqus (a YC-backed blog comment hosting service)
- a synchronized transcript with the audio (crowdsourcing the corrections after the imperfect speech-to-text ML)
- search in the transcript & all annotations/comments
- the best analytics/metrics (engagement, interests, etc.) - "insights per minute" - the most valuable metric for podcast editors - especially for those who are not yet big & successful
- moderation tools
- everything else expected: direct messages, speed control, following & notifications, skip silences, playlists, sharing, rich media
- other possibilities: private comments, grouped comments into tracks/layers, voice replies, personalized pages for shows for podcasters who don't want a full-blown personal website (perhaps a bit similar to MySpace)

Here is a very good podcast on the subject: "a16z - Podcasting and the Future of Audio" (especially from minute 29 till 34)

<https://a16z.simplecast.com/episodes/podcasting-audio-trends-ecosystem-future-5OvJFje>

## **Where do you live now, and where would the company be based after YC?**

(List as City A, Country A / City B, Country B.)

Sofia, Bulgaria, but this is flexible.

## **CONTACT**

### **Personal email address of the founder who is filling out this application:**

Please enter an email address that you check often and that you will have access to for a long time.

[vik.kirilov@gmail.com](mailto:vik.kirilov@gmail.com)

### **Phone number(s):**

+359889897183

## FOUNDERS

### Founders

HACKER NEWS USERNAME	NAME	EMAIL	PROFILE UPDATED
onqtam	Viktor Kirilov	<a href="mailto:vik.kirilov@gmail.com">vik.kirilov@gmail.com</a>	yes
ageor	Anton	<a href="mailto:anton.v.georgiev@gmail.com">anton.v.georgiev@gmail.com</a>	yes
nikoladimitroff	Nikola Dimitroff	<a href="mailto:dimitroff.nikola@gmail.com">dimitroff.nikola@gmail.com</a>	yes

**Please enter the url of a 1 minute unlisted (not private) YouTube or Youku video introducing the founder(s). This video is an important part of the application. ([Follow the Video Guidelines.](#))**

<https://youtu.be/RjjxRtjQjvg>

**Please tell us about an interesting project, preferably outside of class or work, that two or more of you created together. Include urls if possible.**

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**How long have the founders known one another and how did you meet? Have any of the founders not met in person?**

I was in the same class as Anton in school since 8-th grade (2005). We are close friends since 2012 when we started talking about gaming and game development.

I met with Nikola around the game development circles in Sofia about 3-4 years ago when he was a lead developer for a gaming UI middleware company (Coherent Labs) which had built their own HTML renderer.

**How many founders are on the team?**

(Fill out this number of founder profiles)

3

## CATEGORY

**Which category best applies to your company?**

Media

## PROGRESS

**How far along are you?**

We have a prototype that is not yet hosted on a server but have uploaded a 1-minute .gif on our domain showing the interaction with the timeline/zoomline and also how comments are added/reloaded (currently still fake data). We recently implemented a basic server that serves comments & also handles voting and we are currently working on user accounts (login from Facebook/Google/Discord/Reddit, saving preferences & playback progress, notifications for replies to comments, etc). After that, we'll be making it pretty & smooth (animations, transitions, etc.) and then we'll host it on Amazon Beanstalk.

**How long have each of you been working on this? How much of that has been full-time? Please explain.**

- I've been thinking & researching this idea since the start of 2020 in my spare time. This involved surveying the ecosystem of podcasting, writing documents (like this one: [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1dk\\_g38NXluPzDRLtGcqBdO-CJduFZ-0Aqrusfdr4WKI](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1dk_g38NXluPzDRLtGcqBdO-CJduFZ-0Aqrusfdr4WKI)), sketching fakes of the UI, researching what technologies to use & the database structure, pitching & looking for funding. As a rough estimate, I've spent about 400 hours on this.
- Nikola has been working on this since June in his spare time and up until now has clocked around 150 hours. He is the only one who has written any code until now. I've been paying him an hourly rate but we have an agreement that once I quit my current job that I'll go into savings mode and no longer be able to do so ==> we'll continue working as founders.
- Anton had personal matters to attend to in the past 6 months and has only been present at our meetings & discussions but that will slowly change. Securing funding is definitely a priority for a young family. He has a strong affinity towards design, UI & using metrics to improve the UX.

**Are people using your product?**

No

**When will you have a prototype or beta?**

With our current pace: ~2-3 months

**Do you have revenue?**

No

**If you are applying with the same idea as last batch, did anything change? If you applied with a different idea, why did you pivot and what did you learn from the last idea?**

Not much has changed about the idea since 4 months ago when I submitted a late application to YC (at the idea stage), but we have built a basic prototype in our spare time (which will be rolled out on the domain soon). Boldly quitting work is the romanticized way of the entrepreneur but is not always realistic - the stress has to be managed because this is a marathon. I'll quit anyway to work full-time on this by the end of 2020 regardless of the status of this YC submission - currently building a big-enough buffer.

**If you have already participated or committed to participate in an incubator, "accelerator" or "pre-accelerator" program, please tell us about it.**

[BLANK]

**IDEA****Why did you pick this idea to work on? Do you have domain expertise in this area? How do you know people need what you're making?**

I'm a \*heavy\* podcast & internet user and have built sophisticated preference - I've observed where all the platforms/apps are lacking and to what clunky solutions people resort to (if there is anything at all).

## What's new about what you're making? What substitutes do people resort to because it doesn't exist yet (or they don't know about it)?

The new thing is the interaction between the timeline & the zoomline - allowing for functionality that doesn't fit traditional media players.

Here are a bunch of use-cases which we will address:

- people do the same google searches when they hear something interesting on a podcast - imagine an episode with 1 million views, where 20 interesting things are said and only 5% of people actually look them up - that's 1 million searches, clicking through results, etc. - imagine having a comment thread already created for the specific moment with the most important things - with votes, consensus, and reuse of vast amounts of work... + the ability to interact with others!

- discussions around episodes become stale in time (and even archived (can no longer comment or edit) after 6 months in the case of Reddit which is serving a different use case - surfacing what is CURRENTLY being talked about). The task of finding a discussion for something older is hard.

- people often want to bookmark interesting points they hear in a podcast while on-the-go but there is no easy way - imagine being able to simply tap on your phone and continue running/shopping/whatever, and have the ability to look at those bookmarks later - even taking advantage of the comments others have already made! People don't get to fact-check things they hear on podcasts because it's too much hassle.

- Podcast creators still rarely publish the agenda (show notes) of the episodes with specific time points (hour:minute:second) for easier navigation - in YouTube, for example, people compete in the comment section to provide those and hope to get upvoted... when in fact that should be baked into the platform. Example 1: <https://prnt.sc/r9j3tl> Example 2: <https://prnt.sc/rdcwja> - This can be crowdsourced! Also, a 3-hour podcast is just too much - you might want to go through just the most important parts (where the most comments are) - visualized as a histogram. A friend of mine even made this extension which parses the comment section for such timepoints in YouTube: <https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/highlights-for-youtube/jahmafmcpgdedfjfknmfkhajefldcfc>

- people comment on YouTube videos referencing specific moments but the scrolling comments UI is for the entire video and thus the comment needs to get so many upvotes that it stays in the top 20 if it is to actually be seen by others and to be useful - but only 20-30 comments are visible by default (before scrolling & fetching more) and most people don't even scroll down... For a piece of content that has time as a concept - many people don't even bother because of that reason - your chances of being noticed are very slim. The simple chats next to Twitch or YouTube streams which are synced with the content are absolutely insufficient for any meaningful discussion and in the case of YouTube, it is present only if the content was originally being streamed and they are locked in time - no one can add anything after the stream ends.

- people discuss podcasts on many segregated platforms instead of 1 main one - and thus the discussion is shallow and often doesn't go far... But they do care about comments: <https://prnt.sc/ue99ea>

- people cut pieces of videos and re-upload them - one reason being that there is no "quote" mechanism for YouTube (or most other platforms) - to select a sub-range and share a link to it without missing out on the context (there is only for a specific moment - not a range) - there are entire channels that do that which could be made obsolete: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCnxGkOGNMqQEUMvroOWps6Q>

ListenNotes (a competitor) offers the ability to share a link to a specific part of the entire audio but it's clunky at best: <https://www.listennotes.com/clips/120-more-on-googles-podcasting-strategy-and-YHcLRDSjogb/>

- Transcripts & the ability to search in the audio are being requested more and more. There are plenty of speech-to-text AI services that could be leveraged but unlike other platforms that have transcripts, we can crowdsource the removal of errors after the initial ML pass.

- Speech-to-text AI services aren't advanced enough to perfectly annotate and tag the audio/video media which is parseable mainly by the human ear and not by search engines. Imagine crowd-sourcing the annotation & tagging of vast amounts of content. There are so many opportunities once enough content gets annotated - the querying and analytical capabilities will be endless. Which books did Joe Rogan ever recommend or mention? There's a whole website about that... <https://jrelibrary.com/most-mentioned-books/> - but that's not generic - imagine if people could submit "facts" (like special comments) which can get finalized (if there are enough upvotes and very few downvotes) by the community. Imagine querying "how many times did X and Y talk to each other, when, and on which shows"...

Threaded conversations around parts of a podcast (over the transcript) is already present in China! Minute 29 of a16z "Podcasting and the Future of Audio", May 20, 2020 -

<https://a16z.simplecast.com/episodes/podcasting-audio-trends-ecosystem-future-5OvJFfje>

## **Who are your competitors, and who might become competitors? Who do you fear most?**

We fear the eventual consolidation of podcasting platforms the most because more and more content will end up behind a paywall and will not be freely accessible through public RSS feeds to access the audio from any podcatcher (which is hosted behind a CDN by the publisher of the podcast) but I don't see that being the case for the foreseeable future (2-3+ years). Also even though Joe Rogan will be exclusive to Spotify starting 2021 we could still integrate their embeddable player (it has an API) and provide a better experience without violating their terms of service. This matters ==> <https://prnt.sc/ue99ea>

Possible competitors are basically all platforms for audio/video consumption (especially SoundCloud, YouTube & Spotify), but most other small platforms/apps aren't willing to put the user-generated comments & annotations out in the open Reddit-style without requiring an app or an account which we think is a key factor for success. From this perspective Reddit is also a threat, given their recent push towards hosting video on their platform - they just lack the imagination but could copy (or acquire!) us.

Other competitors (both trending upwards on Alexa's website ranking) are:

- Podchaser - the IMDb for podcasts. We would like to eventually either partner with them or even completely outgrow them - we view their mission as a subset of ours. They recently secured 1.65\$ mil in funding.
- ListenNotes - a search engine for podcasts based on the description & tags of episodes and shows found in their RSS feeds - it's growing in popularity but we could easily blow past it because user-generated content is far more valuable compared to what currently can be indexed.

We do not consider Genius (commenting & annotating song lyrics) a competitor because of their narrow focus on songs & their interface.

We need to move fast.

## **What do you understand about your business that other companies in it just don't get?**

- The focus on most platforms has been content distribution and discoverability/recommendation, but the social aspect has been neglected and is the final frontier. Speech-to-text AI is not what would bring the most value - people want to not just search in some transcript (which is useful) but also to look at what other people think and engage with them. Also, such transcribing AI is absolutely not perfect and will not be able to annotate the content



properly. We don't have good indexing on the audio & video content - only on the descriptions & tags supplied by whoever uploaded the content. There is so much which can be crowdsourced.

- Usually, the pages for a piece of audio/video content are full of rarely-useful information such as a long list of tags and a bunch of other links which are visible by default - imagine all that being hidden (but still easily accessible in some sliding panel/dropdown) but having actual user-generated content put front-and-center. Hiding non-essential functionality is not something new - think of YouTube's panel on the top left (on desktop) - that's a good example. We can do better than this: <https://soundcloud.com/giga-boot/joe-rogan-experience-1169-elon-musk>

- There are countless podcasting apps that compete for market share with strikingly similar feature sets but no one is reimagining how this media ought to be consumed & interacted with. For example, the Breaker.audio app is supposed to be "The Social Podcast app" but in reality, it's almost the same as any other. Let's see some of their 8 "core" features on the main page: a sleep timer - so that the podcast stops playing after X amount of minutes, dark mode UI... sharing... faster playback... that's the level of imagination & ambition. Why not remove the static image of the podcast while playing which takes up 1/2 of the screen and actually put that space to use by showing interactions, comments, facts & other useful things from other people?

- Many platforms/apps try to be a walled garden (either behind a login system or even behind a paywall) and try other tactics to facilitate growth - but a platform as open as Reddit can have the biggest network effects. It will be made publicly accessible & browsable on the web even without an account & outside of the app.

- Any of the separate ideas in this project in isolation are probably not enough to warrant a separate product, but their combination is a 10x improvement - the goal is to create the best podcast (& other audio/video) user experience - observe all the areas other platforms are lacking and come up with the best.

## How do or will you make money? How much could you make?

(We realize you can't know precisely, but give your best estimate.)

It will most probably follow the freemium model. There could always be ads, tokens (like Reddit), and even subscription models, + we will have the best data & analytics to offer to content creators and whoever else is interested. ListenNotes makes money on an API for searching its database of indexed descriptions & tags of RSS feeds of episodes & shows - our database will be 100 times more valuable because of the user-generated content.

Here are 2 possible successful scenarios:

- just a (very) good app/platform/interface for podcasts - could be acquired for anywhere between 10\$ million to a couple hundred million \$ depending on the market penetration & monetization. It could also pivot to an extension for YouTube or wherever we see most traction. There are tens of podcasting startups with funding of 10M\$ or even more. Disqus was acquired for 90\$ million - have a look at their business plan: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disqus#Business\\_model](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disqus#Business_model)

- the full ambition: the natural progression of such an interface is to expand beyond just audio and to eventually host the actual audio & video content as well so it could compete with the heavyweights for distribution, discoverability & recommendation. We have no shortage of ambition. You do the math :)

I'm not concerned about making money at this early stage because the goal is to reach the right scale - all we need is to refine the social formula to perfection, + the market is still expanding rapidly.

Quote from Paul Graham ( <http://paulgraham.com/start.html> )

One of my favorite bumper stickers reads "if the people lead, the leaders will follow."

Paraphrased for the Web, this becomes "get all the users, and the advertisers will follow." More generally, design your product to please users first, and then think about how to make money from it.

**How will you get users? If your idea is the type that faces a chicken-and-egg problem in the sense that it won't be attractive to users till it has a lot of users (e.g. a marketplace, a dating site, an ad network), how will you overcome that?**

Our strategy is to work closely with the community of a specific podcast (for example The Portal) which is full of highly analytical people - they have their own discord server, subreddit, forum, wiki, transcripts of the episodes, and whatnot (even a clunky podcast player: [https://player.theportal.dev/?ep=27:\\_Daniel\\_Schmachtenberger\\_-\\_On\\_Avoiding\\_Apocalypses](https://player.theportal.dev/?ep=27:_Daniel_Schmachtenberger_-_On_Avoiding_Apocalypses)). I've already pitched them the idea for such an interface which was received with enthusiasm: [https://www.reddit.com/r/ThePortal/comments/fw146q/a\\_proposal\\_for\\_a\\_better\\_platform\\_for\\_discussing/](https://www.reddit.com/r/ThePortal/comments/fw146q/a_proposal_for_a_better_platform_for_discussing/)

The idea is to onboard as much of that community as possible because our interface provides value only if enough people contribute to specific episodes.

There is a big overlap between that community and of other similar podcasts with highly analytical people (Sam Harris, etc.) and the plan is for the users of the first podcast to become our salesmen & help us expand to other audiences organically.

We will also go after high-profile podcasters letting them embed our player along with the comments & annotations in their personal website - that way they'll want to feature us and drive traffic & eyeballs there so that they can sell their merch and whatever else they have (in addition to detailed analytics) - similar to Disqus, which is also an embeddable commenting service (and a YC-backed company!).

Users will have open access to our development discord to come and talk to us + we'll be doing A/B testing & also have polls for what they want to be implemented next (from a list of features/changes which we would curate).

## **EQUITY**

**Have you incorporated, or formed any legal entity (like an LLC) yet?**

No

**If you have not formed the company yet, describe the planned equity ownership breakdown among the founders, employees and any other proposed stockholders. If there are multiple founders, be sure to give the proposed equity ownership of each founder.**

(This question is as much for you as us.)

The equity split will be 40% (Viktor) / 30% (Anton) / 30% (Nikola)

We will incentivize people with options and will follow a standard model for VC-backed companies with equity distribution as explained by Fred Wilson from USV: <https://livestream.com/skillsharelive/mbamondays/videos/490550>

**Please provide any other relevant information about the structure or formation of the company.**

We will form it in accordance with the requirements of YC if we get funding.



We are confident there is enough talent in Bulgaria to develop a world-class product - the IT cluster in Sofia is booming and there are more and more product companies compared to standard outsourcing.

## LEGAL

**Are any of the founders covered by noncompetes or intellectual property agreements that overlap with your project? If so, please explain.**

No, they aren't.

**Who writes code, or does other technical work on your product? Was any of it done by a non-founder? Please explain.**

All of us are software engineers and no one else has done anything on the project. Until now all code has been written by Nikola.

**Is there anything else we should know about your company?**

(Pending lawsuits, cofounders who have left, etc.)

nothing else.

## OTHERS

**If you had any other ideas you considered applying with, please list them. One may be something we've been waiting for. Often when we fund people it's to do something they list here and not in the main application.**

I have another idea, but it is so weird, ambitious, and far out that I would need a few months to write a couple of essays to motivate it and then will try to make a fundraiser for it on public blockchains. In short: it is about a new way of financing independent & global media, but no one will pay attention to it without me having developed the manifesto so I won't bother pitching it for the foreseeable future (unless someone believes I might have something of substance to share, in which case I'd be happy to present it on a call).

**Please tell us something surprising or amusing that one of you has discovered.**

(The answer need not be related to your project.)

Corporate media has shown tremendous bias and incompetence time and time again. Independent thinkers can disrupt even the most established names - and they should/will. Media has the biggest influence on humanity's direction and my passions revolve around making the exchange of ideas better & more transparent (including the current one - around podcasting - with which I'm applying to YC).

## CURIOUS

**What convinced you to apply to Y Combinator? Did someone encourage you to apply?**

The startup culture and VC funding in Europe are inferior. YC is the best startup accelerator. Period. The YC deal is a good one, + YC itself is a brand - being associated with YC is a selling point of itself. Sadly we aren't developing a SaaS company but we will surely benefit from being

in the YC network in other ways, and hopefully contribute :)

Working in parallel with other like-minded startup founders and a network of alumni is definitely the environment we would like to put ourselves into.

### **How did you hear about Y Combinator?**

If you're in tech and have even a tiny bit of entrepreneurial spirit you will eventually hear about YC.

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