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Startup Tips Month June 2007

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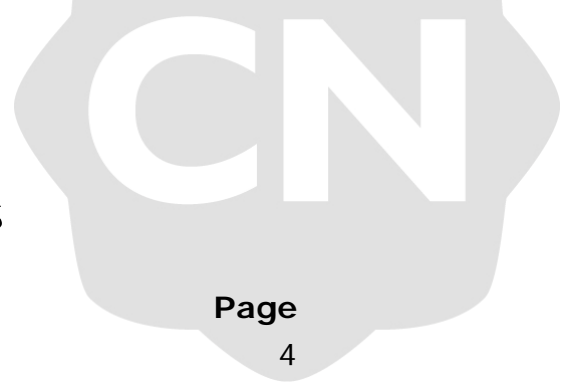


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Alex Bard from goowy

1. The highs are higher / the lows are lower - The key to success is to maintain balance and a level head through both.
2. Surround yourself with the best people possible - you cant do it alone.
3. Make sure you think through why you are starting a company, what are your personal / professional goals and where you want your company to be in 5 years. It will help you make the right decisions along the way.
4. Chances are your original vision for the company will change as the company evolves - make sure you are ready for that change.
5. Be ready to accept failure (9 out of 10 start ups fail)
6. Stay focused
7. Have fun

Alex Bard is the President and CEO of goowy media, inc where he is responsible for the corporate vision, product strategy, and marketing / business development initiatives. Goowy Media develops innovative online products and services that provide simple, intuitive tools for communicating and sharing on the Web. Its two consumer services, [yourminis](#) and the Goowy Webtop, have received high acclaim and are being used by people from all over the world to manage their digital lifestyle.





Alex Hillman from WeKnowHTML

Start Independent

An increasingly popular alternative to "traditional" startups is to hit the freelancer market. There is plenty of opportunity for independent contractors, if you know how to find it and make the most of it.

Tip #1 - Bootstrap

One of the best things about starting out on your own is the ability to spend the first several months working on the cheap. Work with equipment you already own rather than buying all new equipment. Work from home or a shared work environment rather than renting your own office space.

By bootstrapping, you not only find yourself in the black faster (duh, you're not paying back massive loans on equipment), but you also find yourself taking a different sense of pride in your work - and you'll be more confident in yourself. That confidence shines through and (potential) clients love nothing more than a confident Indie.

You have a great advantage when you're first starting out: you don't really need to show off anything except your existing body of work and that you're confident in your own abilities.

Tip #2 - Organize and "polish" your resume and portfolio

Just because you're your own boss doesn't mean you won't be regularly applying for jobs. In fact, every new project that comes in comes with its own set of introductions and interviews. Being prepared with a current, relevant resume could make or break someone trusting you with their project. And for the love of Pete, don't list every job you've ever had or skill you've attempted. Use a tool like Emurse that will help you hone your resume and keep it organized and relevant.

Also, if you have a portfolio of work, that's going to sell you more effectively than anything else. Make sure that it's work that you're proud of and accurately represents your abilities. But also make sure you're allowed to take credit for it.

A portfolio could be presented as list of links included in your resume (a good opportunity to pad it with relevant content if you haven't held a lot of jobs in the industry). It could be something more visual built with a tool like CarbonMade. The best option would be for you to create a slick portfolio page/section on your own site. You do have your own site, don't you?

Alex Hillman is a freelance web developer, consultant and entrepreneur based in sunny Philadelphia. Alex has led and evangelized the coworking movement of Philly by founding [Independents Hall](#), a collaborative community of independent creatives. Alex is also a driving force behind multiple social media and technology events and organizations, sharing his infectious enthusiasm with every person that crosses his path.

Tip #3 - Start Blogging



You don't need to tell the world what you had for dinner last night. Find a niche that you're knowledgeable in, and write about it. If you start documenting thoughtful solutions to problems, you will begin to establish yourself as a reputable source. Document real experiences while you're working. This transparency has a similar effect to an open kitchen in a restaurant. When people can identify with you as a person, they're more likely to continue that conversation into the quarters where they conduct business.

Tip #4 - Get out in the field

Remember, now that you're out on your own, you're not only responsible for doing the work but for finding it as well.

One of the best ways to find work (or better yet, have it find you) is to get out into the field and participate in what's going on in your industry, locally and online. Join mailing lists and participate. When someone has a question that you can answer, help out! And when you've got a question, don't be afraid to ask it. Being active in a community shows that you care, and people like to hire people who care.

This is also a good opportunity to link people back to the resume and portfolio or even better, to that blog I mentioned. Don't "pimp" your work, or you run the risk of making the community uncomfortable. If you're contributing quality posts and content to the communities, people will find you when the time is right.

Tip #5 - Don't underestimate the value of word of mouth

If you're doing quality work and making your clients feel appreciated, they will refer you. There's not much more to it than that.

Tip #6 - Stay horizontal for as long as it makes sense

So, business is picking up; you're not only bringing in work, but you're bringing in more than you can do. And the needs of the projects are calling for some complimentary talent...

Time to hire, right? I don't think so.

Keep your business small, agile, and flat until you absolutely need to hire. I've built my business on top of partnerships and collaborations. I know the boundaries of my skillsets and when to involve someone else in a project. But rather than have employees, I build relationships with other complimentary talent. When a job comes in that needs talents X, Y, and Z, I have a personal network of people to choose from. I've got the most agile and scalable team I could build for any given project.



Alison Covarrubias from Ladies Who Launch

To Office or Not To Office...

As a start up business owner, it is tempting to rush out look for office space. After all, to be successful you must project an image of success, right... and what looks more successful than a corner office with a view? Well, I'm here to tell you that is not necessarily true and the urge to rent is one that could potentially tank you and your bottom line.

During your first year of business, it is more important to use the resources you have available that are free or cheap before you start measuring square footage and pricing out new furniture. No one will find it odd that you don't have an office with a view of downtown or that you have dogs barking in the background. Here are some great alternatives to signing an office lease:

1. Free Internet Cafe's - This is the number one option for home-bound entrepreneurs who need to meet with clients or who simply need to get out of the house. For a few dollars, you have a clean space, access to all the coffee/tea/water you need, a restroom, Internet for free (or less than \$10/day), and actual human contact so that you don't feel isolated. One suggestion, tip your barista! After all, you're camping out in their space and they will be far more attentive and helpful if you throw a little bone their way. Don't empty your wallet as that will defeat the whole "cheap" part of this arrangement, but a couple of dollars depending on how long you stay is sufficient.
2. Library - It's quiet, you have ALL the resources in the world at your fingertips, you can people watch and once again - decent restrooms.
3. Book Store - This option is not so quiet which is nice if you are a talker and like to chit-chat with other book aficionados. Larger book stores often have cafe's and internet access. They want you there so go ahead and hang out.
4. Your Car - Not a great place for typing but if you have a voice recorder or just need some time to think then grab your keys, your driver's license, your hands-free headset and hit the open road! You can get fresh air, see the scenery and talk to yourself or someone on the other end of the phone. Remember that safety is first and if you're not a multi-tasker, leave the phone and recorder on the seat next to you and simply drive to clear your thoughts. It's a cathartic process that often stimulates creativity.

Alison (Allie) Covarrubias graduated from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo with a BA in Speech Communication. Her first big career break came in 2000 when she started working at Salesforce. After an exciting adventure to Thailand in 2005, Alison discovered that the corporate life was not her calling and made the decision to embark on her entrepreneurial career. Alison launched herself and her business when she joined [Ladies Who Launch](#) as the SF chapter leader and is now the Bay Area Director. Her own business, Business Legs offers start up consulting services with an emphasis on marketing strategy for women entrepreneurs creating "lifestyle" businesses. Alison is a born "team player" and when not acting as a part of her client's business teams, she is active in her fitness group, cycling, traveling as much as possible and living a happy and holistic lifestyle.



5. Restaurants - Not unlike coffee shops, restaurants are great for nourishment and meetings. Generally the servers aren't as excited to see you set up your portable office in their section so limit your restaurant meetings to those where you are eating a meal and discussing business. Tip, It's always acceptable to offer to go dutch but the person who suggested you meet for a meal instead of a "regular" meeting generally pays.
6. Friend's homes or offices - Setting up "office hours" with a friend or colleague at their place is a fantastic way to have office-like interaction with someone who also has the entrepreneurial spirit. My friends and I have gotten so much accomplished simply by sitting next to each other and bouncing ideas off one another. It's also great when you have to make difficult sales calls to have a friend nearby to help cheer you on and to offer feedback on how you are handling the call. As always, don't do office hours with negative people who will make you feel bad about your calls or projects.
7. Outdoors - Grab your notebook and pen and go outside. It's so much more fun to have a meeting in a park or by the water than a stuffy old conference room. You have escaped corporate America, stop thinking that professionalism equals confinement. Fresh air, sunshine and a nice breeze say more about a successful business than a cramped space with fluorescent lighting.
8. Spas and Golf Clubs - Now this is where it's good to model our Corporate America counterparts. Where do they go to meet their important clients? Spas, resorts and golf clubs. You can do the same! It's more expensive than the free internet cafe, but a heck of a lot cheaper than a 5-year lease. Plus it's more fun to get in 18 holes or a nice hot rock massage than to deal with wiring your office for the internet.
9. Home Office - Your home office can take many forms and some of them will be more than acceptable for client visits. Your kitchen table, a separate desk, a whole room dedicated to you for the day or at least part of it all make great home offices. It's a temporary situation so don't go sinking all of your start up dollars in fancy equipment, but do invest in making it a happy, comfortable working space where you can find your important files, get work done and have some separation of home and office. As long as there is an extra chair and water, your client will be just fine meeting you there. No chair? Have them sit on your couch - just take an extra moment to clean off the pet hair or baby goo before they sit down.

How do you know if you are ready for an out-of-the-home office? Here are some signs:

- You never get out of your pajamas and are getting a severe kink in your neck from working from bed.
- Your kids/spouse/roommate/pet simply will not get it through their heads that working from home does not mean you are there to work for them.
- Your laundry/tv/garage are unbearable distractions and prevent you from focusing.
- You have more clients than you do hours in the day and they have started to suggest that they would pay more for your services if you wanted to set up a permanent shop.
- You have some actual numbers to look back on to understand how much it costs to run your business without any additional overhead and how much rent you could afford.
- You have at least \$10,000 - \$30,000 set aside to invest in furniture and equipment for a new space. It's a large range but even with the economic genius of stores like Ikea, it adds up fast!
- You have found a space that you can afford, is not a long-term lease, has easy parking, and makes you want to go to work.
- You are ready to take your business to the next level.

And last but not least . . . when setting up your new office. There are just a few things to consider to "do it right." Some things to be when starting your office:



- Elegantly Ergonomic - hire an ergonomic specialist to ensure that your desk is set up properly. You can not afford to injure yourself on the job and take disability. You're paying for it in the end so it's a good idea to pay for it up front and save yourself the pain and distraction. Check out www.elegantergonomics.com for more resources on ergonomic assessments and techniques.
- Professionally Organized - hire a professional organizer to help you eliminate your clutter and establish a good flow for your papers, supplies, etc. Now that you are spending money on real estate, you do not want to waste one square foot with junk that can be an eye sore and hogs up your new environment. It's takes a pro to help with this one. We all carry way too much clutter with us and a discerning eye is worth it's weight in gold. www.balancesf.com
- Environmentally Correct - You have goals and a mission for your business. Incorporate the environment in your cause and you will make friends with mother nature and impress everyone else on the Al Gore bandwagon. Recycle bins, low energy light bulbs, scanners to eliminate paper all together and living plants are all easy ways to enhance your space and do good for the planet. www.greenbiz.com
- Staged for Success - Home and Office stagers know it's easy to transform an otherwise unimpressive space into a show room with a few simple tricks. First, add photo's of you with clients or celebrities. It's not as cheesy as you may think. Seeing you simling with the president or a successful customer makes people feel at ease with you and makes you more trustable. Smell is very important, put in a citrus, vanilla or eucalyptus aroma jar or candle. Nothing too flowery or perfume-y but something fresh and crisp to awaken the senses as they walk in. Invest in quality chairs, not only is it the ergonomically correct thing to do, but it shows your clients that you care about your own posture as well as their comfort. www.visionfordesignonline.com
- Have fun with it! This is your new home away from home. Make it your own but always remember that your clients need to be comfortable too. Leave the slippers under your desk and put them on after you know your client is fine with bringing them out. But do bring them out! You're not in corporate America anymore. Live the dream! Break the rules. Enjoy your space and make it work!



Amy Andersen from Linx Dating

Tip #1 - Think LOCAL.

There are so many entrepreneurs that think global when they first develop their concept. In a prior life, I attempted a youth oriented start-up and immediately thought "national" instead of really understanding my local demographic. Entrepreneurs have a lot to learn about their local markets. With my company that I started over 3 years ago, Linx Dating LLC, www.linxdating.com, I made a huge point to really put blinders on when it came to going outside of the Bay Area.

I could have easily of launched my company in many cities and most likely would have burned out very quickly. Instead, I tapped into my network locally and have truly carved out a nice niche in the San Francisco and Silicon Valley area for the high caliber matchmaking market. As an entrepreneur, once you really VALIDATE your concept and have tested the market, if you have the bandwidth, slowly roll your concept out into other markets. If you are worried about competition, there is always going to be competition. Which leads me to point #2.

Tip #2 - There is always COMPETITION.

Vcs, seasoned entrepreneurs, and friends alike will only giggle if you say your start-up doesn't have any competitors. People often become panicked when there is competition on the radar. As founder of my company, I think competition is a healthy thing to have around you. Competition means there is a market for your concept (what a relief, right?) and it means that your concept in some way has been validated.

Competition also keeps you on your toes, constantly checking out what others do. Always stay tuned into what your indirect and direct competitors are doing. Know them inside and out. Who knows, maybe one day your start-ups will merge, which leads me to point #3.

Tip #3 - Get out there and NETWORK.

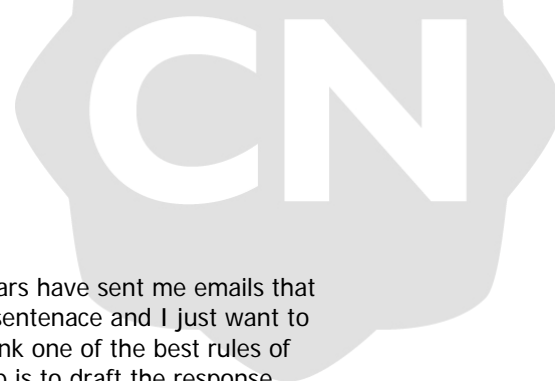
Networking is a key component behind a lot of start-ups future growth. Networking is a good tool for you to practice your pitch in informal settings and shake hands with often influential people. The power of your ever-expanding rolodex will only work in your favor during the course of your venture. I "get" how often at the end of the day the last thing you want to do is go and meet a bunch of random people at a bar.

Instead of spreading yourself thin and doing a lot of networking events, pick two key ones each month to put on your calendar and hit them with enthusiasm and gusto. Bring cards. I think it is so annoying when financiers or entrepreneurs "forget" their cards, which leads me to point #4.

Tip #4 - Smile, be Kind, and Don't BURN BRIDGES.

Gosh, the Silicon Valley is so small and it seems like one insecetious network. Everyone is linked to one another through some sort of connection. Maybe this is their alma maters or former or current professions. In any case, the Valley is too small to be a jerk in any context. As a small start-up, I find it critical to always take the high road, be a leader, be kind, and don't react based on some impulsive

Amy Andersen is from Marin County, and currently resides in Palo Alto. When not linking couples, she loves entertaining, running, time with family and planning her wedding to her perfect match, Alex, a fellow CEO and entrepreneur. [Linx Dating](#) is an invite-only Bay Area based dating and social networking society that links high caliber professionals to one another through traditional offline approaches as well as through exclusive "Link and Drink" parties.



move you might later regret.

For instance, I cannot tell you how many times my clients through the years have sent me emails that anger me like no tomorrow. I feel my blood pressure rise as I read each sentence and I just want to send them an immediate impulsive response that is mean like theirs. I think one of the best rules of thumb when dealing with difficult communication situations in your start-up is to draft the response letter or email and wait 24 HOURS till you send it.

Most likely this anger and annoyance you are experiencing will settle down and when you arrive to the office the next day, you won't feel the same degree of emotion like you did before. If you do, tell yourself that any electronic transmission is permanent and is what you are about to send smart for the future of your small start-up? This leads me to my final point for start-ups #5.

Tip #5 - Maintain your HEALTH, SANITY, and FRIENDSHIPS.

For the first two years of running Linx, I was pulling 20 hour days and living on 4 pots of coffee (that is 16 cups a day or so) and really messing my internal "clock" up. I was a one woman operation, if I did not do the work, no one was going to do it for me. If I did not push to close deals, I did not make my rent and maybe couldn't pay the IRS my taxes. Yikes. So I pushed myself and dug myself into a deep hole.

I realized through the months, I wasn't really that healthy. I had no balance. I was a workaholic and the complete opposite of what I preach to clients for the important of having that "balance" in one's life. Clients thought it was humorous when I would send emails to them at 4:30am, when most normal people had been asleep for many hours. I realized that if you push yourself too much, you might actually burn out and begin to hate what you do. As you pour all your love, dedication and money into your baby....really make a point to treat yourself to time away from your desk.

Maintain your health through regular fitness (join a gym if you were not part of one) and take some fun fitness classes to get your mind off of the daily grind. Try to go to bed at a semi "normal" hour and maintain your sanity too through giving yourself time on the weekends to do something different...something fun. As I had developed this almost tunnel vision, I forgot about my friendships. Don't do this. Again, carve out time to see your friends. They are a wonderful support network for you and your biggest fans.





Andy Sernovitz

Psychological Secrets of Successful Startups

In the end, it's not brains, or good ideas, or money that make an entrepreneur successful. Plenty of people have those. It's your positive attitude, guts of steel, and refusal to believe that you won't succeed. I've advised hundreds of startups -- and the winners all learned these 10 lessons:

1. Customer service first. Take care of the people who give you money. Everything else grows from here.
2. Ethics matter. There is no undo for dishonest behavior. It will haunt you later.
3. Borrow brains. You aren't smart enough to succeed on your own. Surround yourself with mentors, advisors, and winners. Read everything. Grab every idea you can get your hands on.
4. Recognize busy work and distractions. Many good startups have starved while they designed the perfect office, logo, and vision statement. Get to work!
5. Know what has to be done next. Focus, focus, focus. Focus on whatever the most people pay you the most money for.
6. You are not an octopus. You can't do it all. Well, you can, but you'll be doomed to run a small one-person business. Delegate.
7. Shoot too low, think too small. Who works harder - Jeff Bezos or your dry cleaner? You're giving up your life for your business. Make sure it's worth it.
8. Ignore critics. Your family, your friends, people at big companies -- they have no idea what you do or why you're doing it. Ignore them. If they knew what you know, they'd be doing it too. (But don't get cocky - see #3.)
9. Don't flinch. It's scary out here, alone on the tightrope! Don't look down, don't look back, just keep moving. Analysis paralysis will kill you. Just do something--anything.
10. Have fun. If you don't love it (really really love it), you're not going to make it. You don't have to do this, so don't do it unless it's the coolest thing you can imagine doing.

Andy Sernovitz is the author of "[Word of Mouth Marketing: How Smart Companies Get People Talking](#)". He is the founder of the Word of Mouth Marketing Association, teaches at the Northwestern, and used to teach Internet Entrepreneurship at the Wharton School of Business. He has a blog called "[Damn, I Wish I'd Thought of That](#)" full of tips for startups.

Remember the words of Teddy Roosevelt: *The credit belongs to those people who are actually in the arena ... who know the great enthusiasms, the great devotions to a worthy cause; Who, at best, know the triumph of high achievement; And who, at worst, fail while daring greatly ... so that their place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.*





Angie Chang from Women 2.0

- Business model should NOT be "get acquired by Yahoo or Google" - generate real dollars and cents as early in the startup life as you can.
- If your product/service/team is very tech-oriented, be sure to also hire a web/UI designer with marketing experience to make your product compelling and easy to use. Then allow this designer affect change by focusing at least half of engineering efforts on implementing necessary changes for improving user experience.
- Always hire people who are smarter than you are. However, this doesn't mean you shouldn't utilize free help from whoever offers.
- General good management skills always apply -- whenever you think your employee or customer is being difficult, think again about whether you could have been a better manager, or whether you could have communicated better.
- Most importantly, be passionate about your startup and enjoy it while it lasts! A failure can prove positive if you succeed in learning from your mistakes along the way.

Angie Chang is a co-founder of Women 2.0, a networking group of young women entrepreneurs located in the Silicon Valley. She is also a web and UI designer by trade. You can find her blog at <http://thisgirlangie.suprglu.com>





Avichal Garg from PrepMe

Tip #1 - Start by building something you'd want to use

If you build a product to solve a problem or need you have, chances are millions of other people want to use your product.

Tip #2 - Know your competition

Know who is out there is working on similar products or ideas, know their strengths and weaknesses, and be able to explain what you're doing differently (and better!). Google is a great way to do this research.

Tip #3 - Be ready to sacrifice

Building a product and company is a lot of hard work. The hardest part is not coming up with an idea or building the product, it's staying committed enough to do it when you're tired, or when the first major investor says no, or when you have to sacrifice a night out. If you can't give up some of the things that you really care about right now, you will have a hard time sticking with your idea.

Tip #4 - Be flexible

Your initial idea will change so be ready to adapt and let the idea evolve.

Tip #5 - Build a strong team of generalists who can specialize

Find team members who complement each other but who can jump in to do anything. For example, if you are building a team of engineers find great engineers, some of whom think about the front-end, some about the back-end, some about speed, but all of whom can jump in wherever and whenever needed to build a part of the product.

Tip #6 - Write everything down

Whether it's equity arrangements, potential intellectual property and patentable ideas/technologies, or the specifics of your marketing budget, having things written down will force you to clarify your ideas and make sure everyone concerned is on the same page.

Avichal Garg is CTO and Co-Founder of PrepMe.com, an online educational services provider focusing on the test prep industry. Avichal was previously a Product Manager at Google, first in Search Quality where he received an Executive Management Group award for outstanding performance, and then in Ads Quality.





Ben Elowitz from Wetpaint

Tip #1 - Don't hide your idea - share it.

Getting to the great business idea isn't always easy. It can be filled with fits and starts. And when you eventually come up with the killer idea, you can be hesitant to share it with others - will they love it, will they hate it...even worse...will they steal it? That point of view is a mistake. The best thing any entrepreneur can do with his idea is to test-drive it early and often. You'll be amazed by how talking out loud about your idea - especially to folks completely unfamiliar with it - will highlight issues and opportunities you didn't see before. And while you're in the mood for sharing, don't just consult with those folks who always wake up on the right side of the bed. Find some hardcore skeptics and naysayers. They'll give you a million and one reasons not to pursue your idea... and those will be a great screen to compare against your million and two reasons to stick with it.

Tip #2 - If it's core, make it great.

You'll quickly want to establish a roadmap for the one or two unique dimensions that will make your company worthwhile. Regarding those core features, do everything in your power to make sure they aren't just good - make them amazing. Naturally, being great requires sacrifices and tradeoffs. That's where remembering what's core gives you freedom to let go of the periphery. Accept the fact that sometimes secondary features are going to be good. The pursuit of greatness is a fulltime job. Accept the fact that not everything you do is going to be great. Just make sure the stuff that really matters is.

Tip #3 - Launch and iterate quickly.

The best way to get the product right is to get it into market and test it. Focus groups and usability studies are great, but not nearly as valuable as real actionable feedback from consumers and see how they react to it. Accept the fact that they will find issues and have complaints. If you address those issues and complaints quickly and rationally, you'll create a strong relationship with your customers.

Tip #4 - Get a killer coffee machine.

One of the best investments we've made is our larger-than-life coffee machine. It's an amazing piece of machinery - push a couple of buttons, and presto, out comes a perfectly brewed cup of joe. I've been amazed at what a great recruiting device, morale booster, and source of early morning and later afternoon energy this hunk of steel has proven to be. Every office should have something the entire company can rally around. In our case, it's a coffee machine with a 4-digit price tag and an even higher ROI. In some other company, it'll be a foosball table. Whatever it is, make an effort to find that special something. When your startup becomes something bigger down the road, that special something will have earned its place in company lore.

Ben Elowitz is the CEO of [Wetpaint](#) which is changing the way people share and collaborate about passions and interests through its consumer-friendly Wiki platform. Wetpaint powers over 400,000 Wikis created by ordinary people and companies like American Express Publishing, ABC, T-Mobile, HTC, and more. Prior to Wetpaint, Ben was co-founder and vice-president of Blue Nile, Inc. (NILE) and served as Director of Business Development for Fatbrain.com. Ben has also worked as a consultant at eHarmony.com.



Tip #5 - Names and Hires REALLY Matter

Don't compromise on your company's name or your first hires. Your company name is how everyone will identify you. Pick a generic name and you'll be generic to all who hear of you. Pick an inspiring name and you've got a better chance to connect to and be remembered by your customers. And talk about inspiring customers... it takes great people to do that. No matter how busy you are, no matter how much you wish you had someone today, it's better to turn down candidates who don't care, don't get it, or don't live up to your standards. When the right hires come in and interview, you'll know 'that's the one I'm looking for'.

Tip #6 - Cultures - they don't grow in a Petri dish

Your culture is built a thousand times a day. Every employee and every customer is watching you. Your culture isn't what you say it is: it's what other people say it is. It's tempting to want to define culture with a document, so you can sit down and imagine it all down at once. But it's the thousands of actions you take every day, deliberately or haphazardly, that others will draw their own conclusions from.





Benjamin Gott from Indistr

1. Be simple. Don't focus on anything that isn't core to getting your startup off the ground. Be an amazing product first, then be a business.
2. Have a very clear focus. Kind of obvious, but it drives the simplicity mentioned above. Whether its traffic, users, activity, revenue, etc...drive towards that point only.
3. If you can and it makes sense – use in-house or freelance developers and designers. The big houses do amazing work, but its often hard to 'have and idea on Monday and launch on Wednesday' when you are dealing with larger shops. Agility is key in the start up world.
4. Have a good team. A team can be just two people. Never underestimate how much work its going to be – even the easiest stuff can eat up more time than you have, this was a mistake I made!
5. Don't be afraid to develop both the idea as well as the actual product in a bit of a vacuum. Outside ideas and influence can be extremely distracting. That being said, its also important to have a core group of people who you can bounce ideas off of – and it helps if they are from all different user demographics if possible.
6. You don't have to be in The Valley to have a successful tech startup. So don't move there 'just because it's the valley'.
7. Have a clear definition of success, relates back to number (2) in regards a clear focus. Know when you have hit your goals and when you haven't.

Benjamin has worked in the 'internet industry' for about 8 years. I grew up in the south Chicago-land area and I now live in downtown the young thriving city of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Love it. INDISTR, <http://www.indistr.com>, was launched in January 07 with a clear goal of allowing artist to distribute their music directly to the public while staying totally independent. Simplistic in its nature, we allow artist to upload as much music as they'd like, they can bundle their music into albums, price it themselves and publish it. 75% of each sale goes directly to the artist instantly upon its purchase. Our aim is to keep the artist first - big or small, and to ensure all artist have an opportunity to make a living from their art.





Craig Walker from GrandCentral

Tip 1 - Hire Good People.

Don't just hire people who are good on paper or who have "done it" before. Hire people who are willing to work hard and have a ton of common sense. You'll need them to do much more than any single job description can tell so find ones who share that start-up mentality of doing anything necessary to get the job done. And who can figure things out!

Tip 2 - Fix Hiring Mistakes Immediately.

In a start-up, you'll quickly know if you made the right hiring decision or not. It's too small of a team with too much to do. If somebody isn't carrying their weight, it will be obvious...to everybody! Keeping a poor performer on board can serve to de-motivate the others, and you'll have to redo their work later. Fix problems immediately.

Tip 3 - Don't worry if you don't have all the answers.

People will try to poke holes in your ideas from every angle. Regardless of your answers, you can't convince everybody it's the greatest idea in the world. Just keep working and executing. The answers will come or you'll learn to make adjustments on the fly.

Tip 4 - Hire "hungry" people.

There's a temptation to hire the rock star employees who have been with other startups that have become huge successes. These might be great hires, but they might also be difficult to get cranking as they might already be loaded and not willing to put in the effort needed to get your startup cranking.

Tip 5- Find good investors.

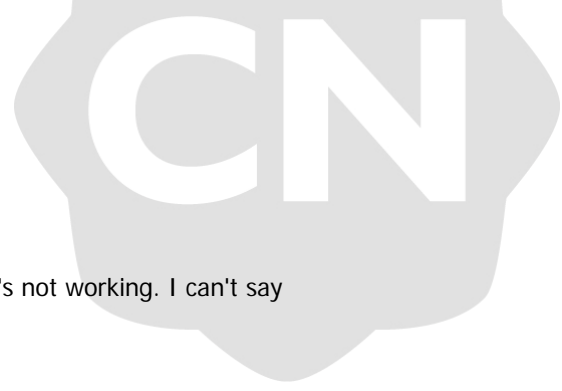
No matter how great your idea is or how smoothly things are going, there will come a time when your investors want to see results. Or want more of one thing and not another. Having investors who understand the startup process (the best ones usually have been in your shoes before so they know what you are going through) and who can really be helpful in challenging times are priceless.

Tip 6 - Don't kill yourself trying to find the perfect partner.

Getting a deal with a marquee name is great, but large corporations move at a pace that is much slower than a start-up and can drain tons of resources from your small team and rarely pan out. Often when they do it becomes a great press release for you and may help with fundraising, but rarely turn into great business opportunities.

Craig Walker is the co-founder and CEO of [GrandCentral](#). In 2001, Craig became the CEO of Dialpad Communications, where he led the company out of bankruptcy and transformed it into the most profitable VoIP company in the industry. When Dialpad was acquired by Yahoo! in 2005, Craig became Senior Director of VoIP and successfully merged the Dialpad team with the Yahoo! Messenger group. Outside of work, Craig spends his free time with his wife and three kids and is a board member of the Ascent Russian Orphan Aid Foundation.





Tip 7 - Did I mention hiring?

It's the first and most important thing you can do. Do it well and fix it if it's not working. I can't say that enough.



Curtiss Grymala from Ten-321 Enterprises

Tip #1 - Plan everything before you do it

I'm not talking about sitting down and hashing out all of the minute details before you actually take any action, but it is always a good idea to set up a structured outline so you have a good idea where you're headed, and what it's going to take to get there. You should do this for every project you take on.

Tip #2 - Create a checklist with deadlines and assignments

Once you have the outline set up the way you want it, assign each item to the team member best equipped to handle it. Then, set a deadline for each item. Set it up as a "checklist" so you can see what you have to do, when each item has to be done, and what's already been done. A tip I hear quite often is to use a three-point method for keeping track of the items on your checklist: 1) leave the "Done" area blank if you have not begun to work on the item, 2) add a dot or a circle in the "Done" area if that item is currently being worked on and 3) Convert the dot/circle to a check mark once the task has been completed.

Tip #3 - Record everything you do when you do it

If a variable pops up that you didn't expect when you initially wrote your checklist, add it into the checklist for future reference. That way, not only do you have a record of what you did, but you also have an updated checklist that you can use if a similar project ever comes up again.

Tip #4 - Establish "ownership" of each resource, checklist item, project, etc.

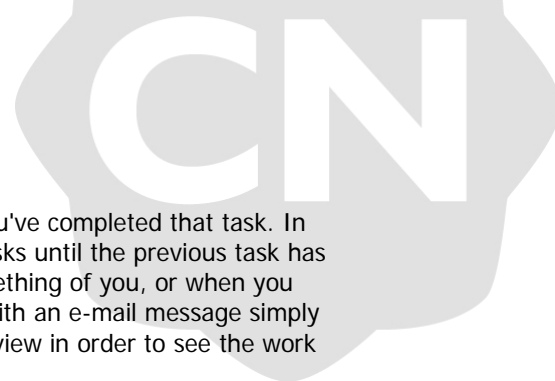
It is very important to establish "ownership" of every project (or step in a project) that you take on. Find the team member best equipped to handle each item, and assign the item to them. Let them "own" it. Don't stress over the items you don't "own". Don't interfere with items you don't "own". Instead, truly "own" the items that have been assigned to you, and make sure that you do anything and everything possible to achieve the best outcome for each of those items.

If you spend your time worrying about items you don't "own", you won't have enough time or energy to get your own items completed. If you work on a resource that someone else "owns", then you could end up setting them back by inadvertently changing their process. If someone else works on a resource you "own" (for instance, a checklist of your own, or a document you've spent months putting together), they could do the same to you, setting you back countless hours. Rather than simply going in and editing documents that your colleagues "own", drop them an e-mail asking them to make the change to the resource. That way, they are aware of every change that happens to their resources.

Tip #5 - Confirm Task Completion

Curtiss Grymala is the full-time Webmaster for a community college in Virginia. In his spare time, he runs a freelance Web development company called [Ten-321 Enterprises](#), is an active participant in the [HTMLCenter Forums](#) and offers small snippets of code and bug reports to the developers and modders of the YaBB Forum system. He has been developing Web sites and applications for nearly 15 years.





When you finish a task, let everyone involved in the project know that you've completed that task. In many cases, there will be people on your team that cannot begin their tasks until the previous task has been completed by another team member. When someone requests something of you, or when you are prompted to do something off of a checklist, respond to the person with an e-mail message simply saying "Done". If there is a link or an image that the person will need to view in order to see the work you've done, include that in the message.

Tip #6 - Leave a paper trail

Do everything through e-mail if at all possible. Asking someone to do something verbally is not nearly as effective, nor do you have any back-up if necessary, as it is to e-mail them a request.





David Weekly from PBwiki

Tip #1 - Do the simplest thing possible.

You're probably pretty smart so you've probably built out a very elaborate scheme / architecture / process for achieving world peace while becoming fabulously wealthy. Drop it. This big-picture kind of stuff is pure intellectual masturbation. Instead, ask yourself, almost as a joke, what the absolute simplest possible version of the idea would be - challenge yourself to something you can do in a day. You may be surprised (positively or negatively!) by the results.

Tip #2 - Write it down.

Again, you're smart, so you have all of these lists and big picture things in your head, and it all makes perfect sense. Or at least, you've convinced yourself that it does. But it's really amazing what putting things down on paper does - it forces wishy-washy things to be concrete, even if you're just writing for yourself. Write down your dreams, your hopes, your schemes. The act of writing them down is an incredibly powerful first step to making them real. Don't pooh-pooh it.

David Weekly, 28, is a Boston native and the founder of [PBwiki](#), the world's largest permissioned wiki host. He's a Stanford Computer Science President Scholar, has spoken at the United Nations in Geneva, taught computing in Ghana, flies helicopters, and hosts big all-night hacker parties at his house in Hillsborough. As of November, he is an uncle of a beautiful baby girl.

Tip #3 - Overcommunicate.

Yet again, you're smart, so everything makes sense to you. There's no need to waste time or pleasantries with business to be done; I'm sure people knew exactly what you meant. Well, not really. Many of the world's problems stem from a lack of understanding of other people, which is mostly due to undercommunication. Make sure you make crystal clear what you're thinking, all the time, to as many people as possible. Foster overcommunication in your coworkers. Note: This doesn't mean calling your ex-girlfriend twenty times a day.

Tip #4 - Learn to fall well.

Something startlingly common across physical activities is managing failure. Simply put, learning for fall well. In jiu-jitsu, ballet, gymnastics, ice skating, karate...even with flying helicopters, you need to learn how to gracefully fail. Don't plan on failing, but know that there's almost no way you can have a successful life without an awful lot of failure. Roll with it when it comes. When I started my company, I read up on a lot of other successful companies and found out that most of them had gotten off to pretty rocky starts.

So when I had a series of very serious challenges very early on (and ended up taking no salary for over three years) I saw that this was not some sign of my lack of luck or poor personal competence, it was a natural part of the road to success. So prepare for the worst but hope for the best and don't be afraid to screw up - because you *will* screw up. Get over it.



Tip #5 - Just do it.

You probably have at least a dozen very good reasons why right now is not the right time to start a company. You didn't just fancy them; they are real and they are scary. But in another light, it's almost a sure bet that right now is the best possible time for you to go ahead and take the leap. The future holds unknowns - children, moves, deaths, departures, increases in costs, mortgages, and debt. The present, for all its pros and cons, is at least well defined. Your lowest risk is probably right now. Don't wait, you will gain nothing in waiting. You are not too young and you do not need the "magic" idea / team to get started. Willpower, risk, and smarts will get you where you want to be.

People matter.

You're smart, you've probably read Ayn Rand, and you think competence alone will drive you. You might look down on those "networking" types who need other people in order to get jobs / deals they don't deserve. You're right and you're wrong - people will amplify whatever innate competence you have. The best is to be highly competent and very good with people. Even if you're introverted and shy, carve out time with people. Have dinner with friends, then have a dinner party where everyone brings a guest. When you talk with people, listen to them and care about them. There is absolutely no investment you can make that has returns close to what you get out of investing in and caring about people. It is satisfying and rewarding on every level.



Gretchen Rubin from The Happiness Project

Tip #1 - Take small steps, every day.

You probably overestimate what you can accomplish in a single afternoon and underestimate what you can accomplish in six months, if you work steadily.

Tip #2 - Ask for help.

It's easy to forget that you're not the first one to go through the start-up process. Don't reinvent the wheel-figure out ways to tap into other people's knowledge and experience.

Tip #3 - The fun of failure.

People with a strong desire for success hate to fail - but if you're not failing, you're not trying hard enough. I tell myself, "I'm going to allow myself the fun of failure," to remind myself to view failure positively, as a symptom of ambition.

Tip #4 - Keep a sense of humor.

The ability to laugh when something goes wrong lowers your stress level, raises your sense of control, smoothes your relationships with other people, and makes your life far more pleasant.

Tip #5 - Get enough exercise and sleep.

Sounds trivial, but it's not. You may have the urge to work 24/7, to skip the gym and to stay up late to get a few more things done. That's short-sighted. Exercise and sleep are critical to having the physical and mental energy necessary to meet a challenge.

Gretchen Rubin is a writer working on The Happiness Project-an account of the year she spent test-driving every conceivable principle about how to be happy, from the wisdom of the ages to current scientific studies, from Aristotle to Ben Franklin to Martin Seligman. On her Happiness Project blog, www.happiness-project.com, she reports her daily adventures on her way to becoming happier.





James Thomas from WackyLabs

Tip #1 - Define your goal

How can you achieve success without a clearly defined end result in mind? Simply put, you cannot. Start with a clear, concise, and measurable goal. If your goal is monetary, split it into something more easily measured. e.g., If you're expecting \$75,000 a year from 2000 subscribed users, then make your goal 2000 subscribed users. If you measure it financially you'll be looking for ways to earn money. If you define the way in which you intend to make money, then your time will be spent looking to fill that goal, and financially your intended results will be met.

Tip #2 - Choose your business partners wisely

This sounds like a given, but excitement can rush you into choosing a business partner too quickly. If your partner is not reliable in terms of delivering work, then they're just dead weight. If their name is on the legally binding documents next to yours, often times when you call it off, you'll have to give up a significant portion of the company or walk away completely from the idea. If your idea is your baby, you can't afford to let that happen, so choose wisely. I personally will take drive over talent any day of the week.

James Thomas is kind of a big deal. He is very important. He has many leather-bound books and his apartment smells of rich mahogany. During the week, he develops websites for Disney Internet Group. During the wee hours of the morning, he develops [WackyLabs](#)' array of websites, including [skinnyr](#), [JamJunky](#) and listobo.

Tip #3 - Launch early, update often

Often times, I've seen startups never get off the ground because they never launched their product. It sounds stupid, I know, but these are brilliant people who focused so much on a full feature set that the whole thing caught fire before they got it out of the oven. Getting your product launched is just the beginning. Content updates, monetization, and advertising are the driving point of your business, most likely. With no product, how will you ever make money? To sum it up, concentrate on your most valuable features with the highest return, launch your product, and make frequent updates. (For more information on this topic, see the Rapid Release Model methodology.)

Tip #4 - Play hardball

You're in the game to win, so play like it. Bust your butt to get your work done, even if it means skipping out on the finer things in life for a while. The world is full of dreamers and thinkers, but the doers are the ones who succeed. Even if you have to force yourself to work, do it.

I've met countless software and web developers with big dreams. When I ask these people what steps they've taken to achieve their goals and dreams, often times I hear a sob story, or a "someone else's fault" story. That proverbial "some day" is today. If you don't have the motivation to move on an idea now, then you probably never will and this lifestyle may not be for you.



Tip #5 - Are you passionate?

I phrased this one as a question particularly because it's not something you control. Are you passionate about the things you're building? If not, you may want to build something else. If you're not obsessed with the things you build for a reason other than money, then your best work will not come out.

Some of my idols in the tech industry include Bill Gates and Steve Jobs. Both are tremendously successful, and both have crazy work habits. They do it because they love what they do, not because they expected to become as financially successful as they are.

Tip #6 - Don't let success spoil you

"Success is a lousy teacher. It seduces smart people into thinking they can't lose." - Bill Gates. To elaborate on Bill Gates' famous quote, success fertilizes egos. What's the difference between someone who has had success and someone who has had failures? If you had success without failure, chances are you don't know what the secret ingredient was that made you succeed. Failures teach experience, and success is never permanent.

I heard a quote once (yes, I love quotes) that made it clear to me. "Those who succeed tend to party, those who fail tend to ponder." Don't party too much.

Tip #7 - Say No

Everyone is a designer. Everyone has an opinion. When you show a product, you're going to hear those opinions. Don't be afraid to say no. If you have a clear vision of your product, and according to tip #1, you should, then don't steer too far from that vision. If someone offers you a groundbreaking, revolutionary feature idea, then consider it. If someone doesn't like the way you handle something, hear them out, but you don't have to implement their idea. You can't please everyone, but you have a startup because you want to please yourself.

Tip #8 - Learn from others' experience

I will never smoke, and I will never drink. I sound like a party pooper, I'm sure. Growing up, I used to hear my parents coughing up a lung in their bedroom at night while I was watching TV. Nearly everybody in my family is an alcoholic. This has taught me that it's OK to learn from someone else's experience. Why relearn what's already been taught to someone else?

Inspiration to Go

Here are a few quotes I deem relevant. Hopefully, you can draw some inspiration from these.

- "It's really hard to design products by focus groups. A lot of times, people don't know what they want until you show it to them." - Steve Jobs
- "It comes from saying no to 1,000 things to make sure we don't get on the wrong track or try to do too much." - Steve Jobs
- "I don't know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody." - Bill Cosby
- "What's money? A man is a success if he gets up in the morning and goes to bed at night and in between does what he wants to do." - Bob Dylan
- "Eighty percent of success is showing up." - Woody Allen





Jan-Joost Rueb from eBuddy

Tip #1 - Keep track of your business

'Every day we know our turnover rate. Any negative results are immediately identified and adjustments are made.'

Tip #2 - Use your entrepreneurial network

'People in your business can tell you what will work and what won't work. Don't be afraid to share your plans.'

Tip #3 - Being an entrepreneur means focusing on output

'You need to be able to work hard. Especially when your business is growing fast, but this doesn't automatically mean more is getting done. You need to watch out for this.'

Tip #4 - Be honest

'When I was in the US with Onno Bakker, our business plan was over taken by the market, we were honest about this towards our investors. As a result their trust in us grew that's why they were willing to invest eBuddy.'

Tip #5 - Trust in yourself

'Don't be fooled by investors promising mountains of gold. Be inspired, explore your values and look for local investors who are willing to give you space to draw your own plan.'

Jan-Joost Rueb is the CEO and co-founder of [eBuddy](#), an online messaging service. Prior to his work at eBuddy, JJ has worked with Gramercy Telecom Ventures, Arbinet and Enertel. He has experience working on three continents and currently resides in Amsterdam, The Netherlands.





Mark Polson from Gradefix

Tip #1 - Business Plan

There is only so much enthusiasm that can be sustained when you are starving. Make a business plan and pro forma projection. If your idea can't make money it won't last long. I see three ways to make money on the internet:

1. Ads/referrals - you must have a massive user base to make this work.
2. Fee for service -this is a good model, but your idea must be unique.
3. Sell something that is tangible, the trick is figuring out what you will sell?!?

Mark Polson is the CEO and Cofounder of Gradefix.com. Mark has worked as a consultant in various industries and has a background in design, marketing, and investing.

Project your plans out as far as you can realistically/conservatively project them, and then double your expenses and half your revenue and if you are still really excited about the results you might have something. I literally go through hundreds of ideas to find just a couple that might work.

Next, check the internet like mad to make sure someone else hasn't already done it. Business studies show that the first mover does much better than the imitators. Don't worry though there are a lot of ideas still left ripe for the taking.

Tip #2 - Team

Besides a good idea the next and probably more important thing you will need is a great team. For the internet you will need the following skills:

- Programming
- Business
- Marketing
- Graphic Design

I have never met one person with all of these skills, yet. So you will need to join forces with people who can provide these skills. When you form your company, don't give out all the equity upfront. Each person should take a small amount of equity and a vesting schedule for performance should be made (i.e. do x get x). This is great insurance for slackers (yourself included). Additionally, saving equity will allow you to raise capital once your idea gets going (only if you have to).

Tip #3 - Sell Value

The goal is to make your customers life much better than they are paying for. No one will pay \$2 for \$1, but they will pay \$1 for \$2.

With Gradefix we realized that our users get to see \$20M movie productions for \$5. Our customers expect a lot in order to pay so we add continuously add more value to our service by doing so more of our user base pays.





Tip #4 - Buy Value

Don't waste money. This can relate to anything, but I think it mostly relates to marketing. It is easy to pay too much for leads, don't spend \$10 to make \$1 that is a good way to go out of business. There is a lot you can do that doesn't cost much. Find similar products out there and figure out how they do it that is a good place to start.

Tip #5 - Customer Wisdom

Your customers will know exactly what you should be, but you have to ask them. We get a lot of positive feedback at Gradefix, but we also get a lot of wants and wishes for what we could be. We have found the customer will tell us exactly what to do! If you aren't getting any feedback go out and show your site to people and survey them about it. It is resolving the criticism that can make your site great.

Tip #6 - Work

Take your task list everyday and sort it from the most value creating tasks to the least and work your way down. You have to work really hard to make a great site. I have heard it takes about 5 years to really build a great company.

Tip #7 - Believe

Belief is like the yeast in bread, it will make your site grow. I have found belief alone will open doors, give you energy, and create miracles. Believe it will work, tell yourself it will work, and ignore the disbelievers (even if they are your friends and family). I used to be negative and cynical, but I have found that was worthless and draining.

Best of luck with your new startup you will find it to be one of the most difficult yet rewarding things you can do.





Matt Curry from PlanbookEdu

Tip #1 - Build it right the first time

A common axiom floating around these days is “just build it.” The thought is that much of the cost of launching a product goes into development. Therefore, if you cut corners on development costs, you can compensate with extra hardware down the road. The additional hardware may help handle the added users as your site grows, but at some point your going to need to fix bugs or add new features. Finding bugs and building on a poorly implemented base is going to cost more than if you had just built a solid foundation in the first place.

Tip #2 - Drink your own artificially flavored fruit beverage

You should be using your own product on a daily basis as an end user would. If you find some user interface element awkward or are constantly thinking, “if only we had this feature”, then chances are your users are saying the same thing. The great thing is since this is your site you can fix it and make everyone happy.

Matt Curry spent two years as CTO for the startup EyeRover Media before cashing out to the tune of \$72. He now does freelance web development in the NYC/NJ area. He writes a blog, PseudoCoder.com, geared towards small, bootstrapped web applications. His current ventures include RSStalker.com, FantasyLife.net, PlanbookEdu.com and camXip.com.

Tip #3 - Make it easy for users to contact you.

Pick a method: blog with comments, forum, email, feedback form, IM, etc... the method doesn't matter as much as the implementation. It shouldn't take them more than 30 seconds to get off a message. Users are doing you a favor by providing valuable feedback, so don't make it hard on them. All of the following are hurdles for the message going from the user's head to your screen: any sort of registration, having to check an email as part of a verification process, CAPTCHAs.

Tip #4 - Reply to every comment – POLITELY

If someone calls you out for releasing a buggy product, take responsibility. Users are much more forgiving if you give them a simple response, such as “We screwed up this release, but we're working our asses off to fix it.” Don't ignore the problem and don't respond to bitter comments with snappy comebacks.

Tip #5 - Pretend you're bigger than you are

Just because your development team consists of you and case of Red Bull it doesn't mean you can be cavalier. Use some form of version control. Have at least three setups of your site, development, QA and production. Don't edit the live code. Keep backups. Write useful comments in your code.





Tip #6 - Know when to get out

Dedication to your startup is important, but don't be blind to a sinking ship. Throwing more time and money at a dieing product is just wasting resources that could be used on your next venture. It can be hard to step away, but the failure shouldn't discourage you from trying something new. Remember: "You only have to be right once" – Mark Cuban.





Noah Kagan from OkDork

1. Never stop. That's when you will succeed.
2. Would you do the work for free? Think about it. If so then you are working on the right thing.
3. If people say it's a bad idea or don't do it. You are probably doing the right thing.
4. Start now. Why are you reading this? If you have an idea or thought just start [coding](#), hiring and get it going now. Why wait?

Thanks for reading my bio! So many people talk about themselves in third person and I prefer the one-on-one conversation. I graduated UC Berkeley in 2004, worked/slept at Intel for a year, worked at Facebook doing product management for a year, created the premier event for social networks, [CommunityNext.com](#) and currently work on marketing at Mint.com, a new free personal finance tool (Sign up for our Beta list). If you want to get in touch please check out my blog [okdork.com](#).



Patricia Handschiegel from StyleDiary

What really does somebody need to know in order to launch and grow a company? I think entrepreneurship is highly instinctive, and that everybody has their own unique skill set and style, but there are definitely a few things I believe are important in creating and building a successful start up business.

Innovate, Don't Duplicate. Success has a weird way of generating regurgitation of ideas, and to me, this can be a sign of inexperience in an entrepreneur. Sites like YouTube, TechCrunch - even my site, StyleDiary - were successful for reasons beyond somebody launching the concept. It's timing, user trends - even technology development and internet speeds. Attempting to recreate something yourself is possible, but you're more likely to see success by making something that doesn't already exist. At the very least, be different. Not in the feature set, but in your concept. A great example? Joost. Video, yes. Like YouTube? No. Differentiate. It can be critical to your success.

Patricia Handschiegel is the founder and CEO of StyleDiary.net, [Look|Shop|List](#) and the [Industry Girl Blog](#) with nearly a decade of experience in internet and technology business.

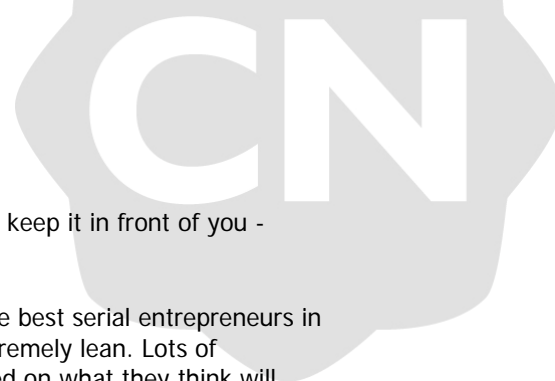
Understand Capital. It's interesting that VC funding comes off as being so sexy in the media, when nearly everybody I know says to avoid it if you can. I'm mentored by some of the best people in the business, and the first thing everybody - and I mean everybody - has said is not to do it. When companies raise additional rounds, it's not always a good sign, either. Some ideas need funding in order to happen, but be wise about it. Don't get swept up in the glamour of doing it - there is a good reason why people say it's not an ideal expansion plan.

Focus on the B Plan. It's easy to get excited about the potential of a business, especially when the market's hot like the one we're in and entrepreneurs seem to be cashing out in millions everywhere. Get into actually owning a start-up, and it's a totally different picture. Behind all of those great success stories were years of somebody busting their tail, probably going broke, and struggling along under huge constraints and stress. That's more than likely going to be you, no matter how much you want to believe otherwise. Keep your eye on the second prize - running and developing a successful, profitable and viable business. That's how you'll get the Googles of the world to notice.

Be Careful with Partners, Partnerships and Agreements. Owning a business with somebody else is a lot like moving in with a roommate. You don't really know a person until you're in the thick of things with them. Different people have different entrepreneurial styles, approaches, mindsets - before you marry somebody into your concept, think through whether or not they're a fit beyond their skill set. And when you do choose somebody, be careful with the arrangements. I take an automatic, high percentage on any ideas I bring a partner into, I'm a little stingy about how things are diced up, and nothing happens without signed contracts before anybody lifts a finger. This was learned the hard way. Be careful with who you bring in and what you give them, including friends.

Know That Making Money is Difficult. It's been said that it takes five years to reach profitability in the restaurant business, that you may never see it in retail. Ice arenas are allegedly constant money pits. Yet, somehow, when it comes to launching your own start up, it's easy to think things are going to be different - especially in internet business. Making money is hard in any market, period. Don't think about the 2.3 million you could sell for, and don't believe for a second that revenue will instantly come





in. The reality is far different, and you'll fare much better to know it - and keep it in front of you - beforehand.

And Don't Spend What You Don't Have! I've learned under two of the best serial entrepreneurs in telecom, with lots of hits behind them, so I've always run my projects extremely lean. Lots of entrepreneurs I know, however, have made the mistake of spending based on what they think will come in - and believe me, it can be the death of your business. Treat each expense as if you don't need it - and only spend on the absolute that is necessary, including if/when you take capital. Money blows through a business so fast, people don't pay on time or sometimes at all, projections can be off, etc., so never - ever - spend on what you're expecting to come in. Keep all of your expenses, at all times, as lean as you can for as long as you can. You can have the fancy office later.

Read, A lot. I'm slammed all the time. I work a part time job that pays for my lifestyle while running StyleDiary and launching Look|Shop|List, yet I always make time to read the top blogs, business magazines and anything else I can get my hands on any chance I get. It gives me intelligence into the market, what's happening now, what might happen next, and has also played a really important role in connecting me with other people I need to know in business. It has definitely played a huge role in my success as an entrepreneur.

Do Your Thing. It's easy to get swept up in what's around you, especially in the current "Web 2.0" climate where huge hits are happening everywhere and opportunity seems imminent. The problem is, your business is going to be unique to itself no matter how hard you try to skew it. There's a reason why a site like MySpace climbed to the top as it has, and those reasons may not be present when you launch your business. Market climate, user trends, technology innovation, even the economy, can all affect how your company does and who it attracts. I don't try to be anybody else's business - I just try to be my business, and do it as well as I can.



Peter Glyman/Shawn Ward from Geezeo

Tip #1 - Find a good business partner

We couldn't imagine going through the startup solo. Accomplishments are much more enjoyable when shared with a friend.

Tip #2 - Healthy balance of product focus and flexibility

If you keep the blinders on you might miss a bigger opportunity. This doesn't mean chase every offshoot idea but you should evaluate the opportunity associated with modifying your business direction.

Tip #3 - Hire great people

Creativity and passion win over resume pedigree every day. (and that doesn't mean everyone needs to have an MBA)

Tip #4 - Pick the right investor(s)

Don't take money from an investor you wouldn't want to have a beer with. If the investor isn't fun to be around in the courting stage...they're not going to be after they've written you a check.

Tip #5 - Meetings ~ Innovations Kryptonite

Don't schedule meetings to talk about relevant issues. Communicate 24/7 - IM, foonz, text, email, phone call, smoke signals. Just get 'er done!

Tip #6 - Leverage all the free/low-cost resources you can

Some of the products and services we use at Geezeo include: open source technology, gmail, google docs, basecamp, lighthouse, skype, freeconference.com, foonz, bank of america payroll.

Tip #7 - Get your product out and get feedback

Don't assume you know what the world wants, there's no substitute for real feedback. Besides...it's never going to be "done" anyway. If your product is "done"...you just got beat by someone with a better product.

Tip #8 - Stay connected to the entrepreneurial community

Go to meetups and start meeting some other like minded entrepreneurs. build a network of trusted friends you can share ideas with and help each other succeed. We attend as many technology meetups as possible. In the Boston area we hit the Web Innovators Group regularly.

These tips come from [Geezeo](#) founders Peter Glyman and Shawn Ward.





Tip #9 - Listen to tunes at work

Music is good for the spirit and the creative mojo. Better yet...play an instrument at work. Rock On!





Rachel Cook from Minti

1. Be clear on your market and how you intend to make money in it.
2. Be very good at focusing on what makes the business grow not just PR.
3. Network a lot and get to know people over time, getting referrals from people you trust, you will get valuable hires.
4. Work to set up a close entrepreneurial team around you for an advisory position, an accountant/attorney of some market influence
5. Your key concept of your idea needs to resonate with you and absorb you, so you can ignite the passions of others
6. Be niche, have a very good idea and product you believe in and have a very good reason as to what problem you are trying to solve. I was told once 'how big is the market pain and how good is the penicillin'
7. Build up your reputation even if no one knows you to begin with, let people see your entrepreneurial mind (twitter, blog about something that will perk up the VC's or other entrepreneurs, connect with people on linkedin)

Rachel Cook is the Founder of [Minti](#), a parent-to-parent social networking place for parents to write, read, share and rank advice articles on parenting. Rachel has been a serial entrepreneur, since July 2000 as a co-owner of ineedhits.com (Search Marketing), Co-founder of Vibe Capital (building social advice-opedia communities on the vibEngine platform), Co-founder of a new start up at Codestr LLC (building next generation social applications) and is author of the popular blog "[Talking Tech on Family 2.0](#)"





Richard Anson from Reevo

1. Write a business plan, whether or not you are seeking investment.
2. Get as much feedback from people as possible - ideas are cheap, its the execution thats tough, so dont be too concerned about others stealing your idea.
3. Develop a team of advisors/NEDs to provide objective, critical and constructive feedback and support.
4. When you raise money, ensure it is smart money - ie your investors can add value and support to the business over and above their investment of cash.
5. Surround yourself by positive can do people - both inside and outside the business.
6. Finally, dont expect things to be easy, enjoy the highs (they will be huge) and persevere through the lows (you will have them).

Richard Anson is CEO and co-founder of [Reevo](#) which is rapidly becoming Europe's largest provider of impartial, genuine customer reviews to leading retailers. Prior to founding Reevo, Richard was a senior strategy consultant at KPMG covering the technology space, was previously interim Head of Group Planning at Orange. He has a PhD and MBA from the Cranfield School of Management.





Stephan Uhrenbacher from Qype

Tip #1 - Ship the product

Too many people worry about business cards, legal work, corporate structure too early. There will be ample time for that. My advice: Build a prototype and get it out there (obviously this rule helps you more if you build a website than if you plan to launch a new car). If your prototype makes people smile, then the rest will follow.

Tip #2 - Listen to your customers and improve quickly

Make sure you get your customer feedback quickly into your development cycle. Qype had about 3000 suggestions for product enhancements during the first six months and we implemented more than 500 of those.

Tip #3 - Make sure your company does make money

Yes, we always envy companies who never made a profit and are being sold for billions. The much safer bet is to build a company that truly generates value. And value means cash. Start working on the cash side of your business very early on.

Tip #4 - People are the core of your company

It is tempting to hire freelancers who can quickly help you to start up. However, long term growth will only happen if you keep talented people on board. And it is very hard to convert freelancers into loyal members of a team. Freelancers want to be free.

Tip #5 - Then think about funding

If you have a decent prototype to show and have a backbone of a team, know where the money will come from, then funding discussions will be much easier.

Stephan Uhrenbacher is the Managing Director of [QYPE](#). Qype is the largest local review website in Europe, and has started in Germany and is currently launching in the UK.



Steve Poland from Web2.0forsale.com

1. Avoid credit card debt -- Yes, you likely think you have that idea that's going to turn into a gazillion dollar business, but you likely don't. Don't get in over your head financially.
2. Work for "the man" while you work on your start-up in your spare time. Make sure you have that steady paycheck coming in to pay your bills. If not working for "the man", you could do some outside consulting (web design, marketing, programming - whatever you're good at).
3. Project Management -- I use 37 Signal's Basecamp. It allows me to keep track of tasks, assign tasks to others, message threads about certain aspects of the start-up (various programming, design, marketing ideas, etc). Put the time in to use something like this, so that you're organized -- rather than having yellow sticky notes all over your desk.
4. Accounting sucks, but somebody has to do it -- and that somebody is you. I use Quickbooks Online -- it's so incredibly simple. Back in highschool I was on the math team and in accelerated math classes my entire life; when it came to accounting, it was one of two classes in college that I failed. I even tried understanding Quickbooks, but couldn't -- but Quickbooks Online, or Quickbooks Simple Start -- incredibly easy that even this failed accounting student can use it.
5. Talk to everybody about your idea/business -- remember, success is in the execution of an idea into a real business. If you tell someone your idea, they aren't going to go steal it -- and even if they do, you're so ahead of them in terms of thinking things out, that you've got a head start. You need to talk to everyone you possibly can about your idea -- to help shape it, find out specifically the needs you're addressing, and find out if someone would actually use this. Talk to at least 50 people outside of your friends/family/colleagues circle -- you want real answers, not fabricated "That's cool man" answers from your best friend.
6. Setup Google Alerts and Technorati alerts for your competitor's names. This will allow you to keep up on when your competitor's are being mentioned, so you know what they're up to -- and it'll also let you know what bloggers or other publications are interested in your area of expertise; reach out to those bloggers and make your name known to them -- tell them what you're up to and toss your idea/business at them, they'll likely give you some great feedback on how you could better differentiate.

Steve Poland is a guest contributor to TechCrunch and runs his own blog [Techquila Shots](#) where he brainstorms web business ideas. He also operates [Web2.0forsale.com](#) and is co-founder of the not-yet-launched start-up [WeBothLike](#).



Sumaya Kazi from TheCulturalConnect.com

1. Surround yourself with people smarter than yourself. It can only breed success.
2. While having a start-up you and everyone else on your core team must have a PhD mentality. That is, of course, to be poor, hungry and driven.
3. More often than not, people sit on great ideas. Don't be one of them.
4. If you think you can't do something - you probably can't. It's those that reach for the impossible that make many more things possible happen along the way.
5. Network like hell. When you're young and have a start-up, it's important to leverage the connections you've made. You'd be surprised to see how far you can go when others are just excited about your start-up and about your ideas.
6. Innovate. Innovate. Innovate. You might have a great idea today, but will it be the same tomorrow?
7. Try to maintain enough ambition and energy to achieve your goals, but also enough humility to accept the challenges and rejection that comes with being an entrepreneur.

Sumaya Kazi, 24, was recently recognized by BusinessWeek Magazine as one of America's Top 10 Entrepreneurs Under 25 and the only solo woman featured in its Global Top 75 Entrepreneurs list. She currently serves as the Executive Director and Co-Founder of TheCulturalConnect.com, a burgeoning media publishing company that publishes five weekly e-magazines dedicated to young, driven and forward-thinking adults around the world.



Tara Hunt/Chris Messina from Citizen Agency

Tip 1 - Define your own success.

If you're going after a million bucks with your own startup, you've already failed yourself. Instead, do something because it's interesting, challenging, it offers you the chance to learn something new or gives you the chance to work with really interesting people. Most startups that are designed to make money, especially in this environment, don't.

Tip 2 - Pick the right people.

Work with people who you trust, who inspire you, who surprise and challenge you, and who you can count on. Also think about ways of trying out low-risk engagements before going whole-hog into startup mode. Starting up a business is incredibly stressful; you need to know how you and your partners function under pressure -- don't wait for the real deal to experience the weaknesses in your team, instead, work on a smaller scale project under a deadline and see how the fault-lines emerge. It's not about avoiding difficulties; instead to how people handle conflict and how the team stays on target. That should prepare you when issues come up later (and believe me, they will!).

Tip 3 - Diversity is essential.

I've talked about this a bit on my blog, and Tara has really helped open my eyes to this. I've always felt that diversity was important, but never really was aware of how I had my own blind spots where I'd overlook certain people or make assumptions about how they wouldn't work out... but what I've come to see is the value of diverse perspectives, experiences and backgrounds to really round out and solidify the foundation of any good idea. No matter how much you think you know about the world, there's nothing better than testing it against what people really do. Surrounding yourself with people unlike yourself is a great way to ensure that you don't only cater to folks hip to the latest and greatest geek fads but who also exist outside of your startup bubble.

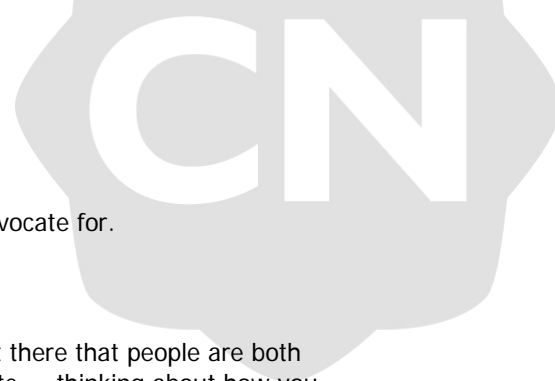
Tip 4 - Put community first.

This is something that in practice is very hard to do when you have budgets and bills to deal with, but for the long term viability of your project, you really do need to put community in the lead of all your decision. Now, to be sure, that doesn't necessarily mean that you bend to every whim of your community, but that instead, you act as a gatekeeper to what gets in and what experiences your community has. You are your community's first and last line of defense and if you side with anyone

Chris Messina (aka Factory Joe) has spent many years as an Open Source Ambassador. From his work on the Spread Firefox campaign to holding the title of Open Source Ambassador at open source browser startup Flock, Citizen Joe dedicates his time and energy to making the world a better place through spreading open source and open source principles. Chris is a co-founder and Citizen Executive Officer at [Citizen Agency](#).

Celebrated as Marketing 2.0, Tara Hunt has worked in a plethora of industries, from non-profit to consumer beverages to technology for over the past 7 years. She is a frequent speaker at technology conferences on the subject of marketing and community building, including Mesh, the Future of Web Apps and the upcoming ETech and Web 2.0 Expo. Tara is a co-founder and Citizen Marketing Officer at Citizen Agency.





but your community, you'll shortly thereafter have no community to advocate for.

Tip 5 - Don't reinvent the wheel.

Do find nooks to add real value. There's a lot of infrastructure already out there that people are both using and familiar with. Don't build just another event or photo sharing site ... thinking about how you can leverage open web services and existing platforms to build something of real value... and make it really easy for people to get their data in -- and out. It's just good practice.

Tip 6 - Communicate, communicate, communicate.

If anything, make sure to communicate what you're doing, what you're up to, what's going on and what issues your facing as often as you can -- even if [you think] no one's listening. This serves both as a log of your activities and a personal record that you can refer to later but also opens the possibility that someone might just come along and be able to help you in some unexpected but totally necessary way!





Ted Rheingold from Dogster

1. Entrepreneurship is akin to living your life on a roller-coaster. Highs and Lows happen weekly every week of the year. To steel yourself for the lows, avoid over-celebrating the highs.
2. Picking the right founding partners is the most important of your whole company. Do not enter into relationships with any unknowns such as capabilities, professional expectations and aspirations, working requirements for the first 3 years, trustworthiness, adaptability. You are, in effect, marrying these people. Make sure there is not a premature divorce.
3. Line up a diversified list of advisers early. Look for people that have both the time and interest. If their primary interest is money, they are probably not ideal.
4. Spend as little money as possible to prove your model. Strive to prove revenue models while you prove customer adoptions.
5. Run your business as a business based upon tradition business practices. It's heartbreaking to invent the next Rubik Cube only to learn that you can't even get the money back it cost to develop.
6. Get management and finance books and read them. While you may be great at inventing new technologies, running a business is just as important a skill.

Ted Rheingold, CEO, founded [Dogster](#) & [Catster](#) as a way for people to unite around their common passions. At Dogster, Inc., Ted sets the company's strategic direction and growth, though he's still a coder at heart. Prior to founding Dogster, Ted's entrepreneurial and leadership skills were honed running the web services company One Match Fire, which he founded in 2002.



Yukiko Ohta from One Team Technologies

Tip #1 - Accept Change

Know that the only constant in the life of a start-up is Change, and you must be ready for anything! Accepting this truth will keep your mind calm and more open to new opportunities.

Tip #2 - Listen

Always listen and learn. Everyone has something unique to offer. You never know where your next great idea will come from. Stay out of your ego!

Tip #3 - Respect

Be respectful to other companies and people even if they are not respectful to you. The positive and negative attitudes of others can encourage you to do better, push harder and be more successful. Start-ups always have a lot of work to do and should use just about everything to get things done!

Tip #4 - Always Forward

No matter how things get rough and challenging at times in your business, keep going forward. Learn from your mistakes and make corrections, but never turn back. If you keep going forward, there are always possibilities for renewal and growth.

Tip #5 - Rejuvenate

After working 16 hours a day for 7 days a week, force yourself to turn off the phone and PC. Go do something fun. YOU are the most critical vehicle for your success. Keep YOU in mint condition by balancing your body, mind, and spirit.

Yukiko Ohta is the Chief UI/UE Designer and one of the co-founders of [One Team Technologies](#), a women-owned software company that offers one of the first solutions for creating user-generated web database applications. Yukiko is also available for freelance projects and consulting. You can see her work samples in her [portfolio](#).





Thank you!

Thanks to all of the awesome entrepreneurs who participated in the first CenterNetworks Startup Tips Month.

And thanks to all of the CenterNetworks readers who made this effort the best yet!

