1 - Alexis Ohanian: How to make a splash in social media

So, now, there are a lot of web 2.0 consultants who make a lot of money. In fact, they make their livings on this kind of stuff. I'm going to try and save you all the time and all the money and go through it in the next three minutes, so bear with me. Started a website back in 2005, with a few friends of mine, called Reddit.com. That's what you'd call a social news website.

Basically all that means is that the democratic front page is the best stuff on the web. You find some interesting content, say a TEDTalk, submit it to Reddit, and the community of your peers will vote it up if they like it, vote it down if they don't. And that creates the front page. It's always rising, falling, always changing. About a half million people visit every day. But this isn't about Reddit. This is actually about discovering new things that pop up on the web. Because in the last four years we've seen all kinds of **memes**, all kinds of trends get born right on our front page.

But this isn't even about Reddit itself. It's actually about humpback whales. Well, okay, technically it's actually about Greenpeace, which is an environmental organization that wanted to stop the Japanese government on their whaling campaign. These humpback whales were getting killed. **They wanted to put an end to it**. And one of the ways they wanted to do it was to put a tracking chip inside one of these humpback whales. But to really kind of personify the movement, they wanted to name it.

So, in true web fashion they put together a poll where they had a bunch of very erudite, very thoughtful, cultured names. I believe this is a Farsi word for "immortal." I think this means "divine power of the ocean" in a Polynesian language. And then there was this: Mister Splashy Pants.

And this, this was special. Mister Pants, or Splashy, to his friends, was very popular on the Internet. In fact, someone on Reddit thought, "Oh, what a great thing, we should all vote this up." And, you know, Redditors responded and all agreed. So, the voting started and we actually got behind it ourselves. We changed our logo, for the day, from the alien to a Splashy, to sort of help the cause. And it wasn't long before other sites like Fark and Boing Boing and the rest of the Internet started saying, "Yes! We love Splashy Pants."

So, it went from about five percent, which was when this **meme** started, to 70 percent at the end of voting. Which is pretty impressive right? We won! Mister Splashy Pants was chosen. Hmm, just kidding. Okay. So, Greenpeace actually wasn't that crazy about it, because they wanted one of their more thoughtful names to win. So they said, "No, no, just kidding. We'll give it another week of voting."

Well, that got us a little angry. So, we changed it to Fightin' Splashy. And the Reddit community, really, and the rest of the internet, rather, really **got behind this**. Facebook groups were getting created. Facebook applications were getting created. The idea was, "Vote your **conscience**," vote for Mister Splashy Pants. And people were putting up signs in the real world. And this was the final vote. When all was cleared ... 78 percent of the votes, and to give you an idea of the **landslide**, the next highest name pulled in three. Okay?

So, there was a clear lesson here. And that was that the Internet loves Mister Splashy Pants. Which is obvious. It's a great name. Everyone wants to hear their news anchor say, "Mister Splashy Pants." And I think that's what helped **drive** this. But what was

cool was that the **repercussions** now for Greenpeace was, they created an entire marketing campaign around it. They sell Mister Splashy Pants shirts and pins. They even created an e-card so you could send your friend a dancing Splashy. But what was even more important was the fact that they actually accomplished their mission. The Japanese government **called off** their whaling expedition. Mission accomplished. Greenpeace was **thrilled**. The whales were happy. That's a **quote**.

And actually, Redditors in the Internet community were happy to participate, but they weren't whale lovers. A few of them certainly were. But we're talking about a lot of people who were just really interested and really caught up in this great meme, and in fact someone from Greenpeace came back on the site and thanked Reddit for its **participation**. But this wasn't really out of altruism. This was just out of interest in doing something cool.

And this is kind of how the Internet works. This is that great big secret. Because the Internet provides this level playing field. Your link is just as good as your link, which is just as good as my link. As long as we have a browser, anyone can get to any website no matter how big a budget you have. That is, as long as you can keep net neutrality in place.

The other important thing is that it costs nothing to get that content online now. There are so many great publishing tools that are available, it only takes a few minutes of your time now to actually produce something. And the cost of iteration is so cheap that you <u>might as well</u> give it a go.

And if you do, be genuine about it. Be honest. Be up front. And one of the great lessons that Greenpeace actually learned was that it's okay to lose control. It's okay to take yourself a little less seriously, given that, even though it's a very serious cause, you could ultimately achieve your final goal. And that's the final message that I want to share with all of you -- that you can do well online. But no longer is the message going to be coming from just the top down. If you want to succeed you've got to be okay to just lose control. Thank you.