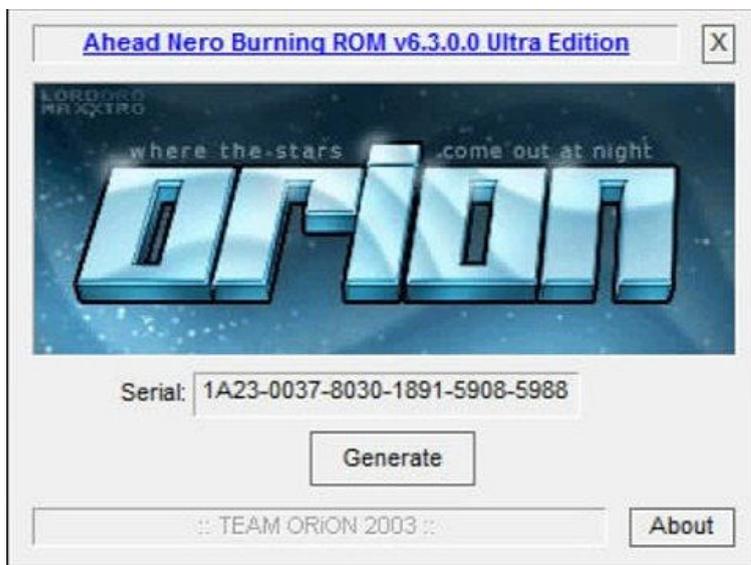# Everything I Know About Founding a Startup I Learned from the Underground 'Scene '

My business school reverse engineered your business school

When I was a freshman in high school I stopped attending school regularly. **I thought learning assembly and writing keygens were way more fun than geometry**. I put the high school's outbound number on call block so they couldn't call my parents and spent my days learning as much as I could about reverse engineering software.

Nero Burning ROM v6.3.0.0 Keygen

As I progressed in my 'skills' I was eventually asked to join a cracking group (a private, invite only, group that removed copy protections from software). After about a year I decided to go out on my own, and start my own group (sound familiar entrepreneurs?). So, me, and a few fellow crackers founded a brand new group, and started from scratch.

We had to do the same things all startup founders would do when starting a legit startup: formation, branding, recruiting, operations, business development, partnerships, and **most importantly: execute.**

To form such a group, one has to construct a name that hasn't already been taken in the history of 'the scene'. This is important, as you don't want to choose something lame, and you want other groups to respect the name. Such names were something like: PREMiUM (*'i' is always lowercase*), ORiON, CLASS, etc. You also need to solicit the services of one of the ASCII groups (8bit artists from the DEMO scene) to draw an .NFO and file_id.diz file. These files had to be included in all your releases so that they gave attribution to your group and the FTP servers knew how many zip files to expect on a transfer.

roy/sac is a legend ASCII artist

You had to be damn good at recruiting. 'The scene' wasn't Silicon Valley, you couldn't just walk into a Blue Bottle Coffee in Mint Plaza and find someone who knew Python. There was a limited supply pool of crackers. You had to know people and be able to cold message people on IRC and convince someone across the world to join your illegal reverse engineering group, and to do it for no compensation at all. No easy task.

Once you had members, you had to organize them and setup weekly meetings on IRC. You also have to create processes in order to scale. Pickup TCL programming so that you can have bots in the IRC room that could manage releases and push releases to FTP servers automatically. Bots that could keep track of 'supply'—software that was uncracked and needed to be cracked, and keep track of who was working on what software so that double work wasn't done.And even more scripts and bots to package cracked software and fill out the NFO and file_id.diz files automatically in order to streamline the process of pushing out releases.

We did all of this for NO money.

"I did it for the game…" Tone Trump
You also had to form alliances with other groups. Say one group had a cracker that was really, really good at RSA factoring. In exchange for them factoring the RSA public key, you would give them an uncracked piece of software that was hard to come by (think no online download with 30 day trial). There were no contracts, just verbal agreements.

Just like any startup there was the inevitable HR issues. People not showing up to work, internal political games, people leaving your group for another group, or people bringing personal issues to the group.

Looking back, **we were just kids that learned too much too fast for our own good**. I dropped out of the scene around the age of 18, when I started to realize that my actions were hurting real people. People who had spent a good part of their lives writing software to provide for their families.

I eventually went to university after a few years of community college. There, in my free time, I started to help the same developers whose software I had cracked write stronger copy protections and encrypt their binaries to stop noob crackers from writing simple patches.

Having my first 'startup' being 100% ran on IRC, I think it makes me yearn for that experience again. At every company I've joined, I always find myself pushing for processes and tools to help better scale the companies internal communication and business operations. After all, if a freshman in high school can scale a team and processes to 150 releases a month using IRC and eggdrop scripts, **what excuse does your company have?**

If you found any value in this piece, it would mean a lot to me if you scrolled down and recommended it.