Turnitin Business Model

Idea In Short

- **CEO:** Chris Caren
- **Founders:** John Barrie
- **Year founded:** 1998
- **Headquarter:** Oakland, California, USA
- **Employees:** Estimated 417
- **Type:** Private
- **Annual Revenue:** Estimated $127.7M
- **Products & Services:** Online Plagiarism Checker
- **URL:** https://www.turnitin.com/
- **Competitors:** Unicheck, Copyleaks, Academicplagiarism
- **Business Model:** Subscription

Turnitin is an online tool that is used to detect potential plagiarism in students' work. Growing from one million student paper submissions in 2002 to one billion in 2018, Turnitin serves over 15,000 institutions globally. The company is headquartered in Oakland, California. It also has international offices in the U.K., Netherlands, Australia, Korea, India, and throughout Latin America. The company states that its software is geared toward promoting academic integrity. Beyond detecting potential plagiarism within a paper, Turnitin can also identify instances of contract cheating, where a third party has written the student's work for them. The tool, called Authorship Investigate, does this by using machine learning algorithms and forensic linguistic practices to detect major variances in writing style among one student's work.

> Turnitin's proprietary software promotes student authenticity, instructor effectiveness, and better educational outcomes. Through machine learning, computer vision, and advanced Artificial Intelligence, Turnitin's products check for plagiarism in writing and code assignments, provide real-time feedback for students, and automate grading for teachers across multiple disciplines. Turnitin's

products are used by over 34 million students in over 15,000 K-12 and higher education institutions in 153 countries. Its global reach and network of clients, including educational and research institutions, corporations and governments, have enabled Turnitin to build an unparalleled database of content used to check for text similarity and verify authorship.

How Turnitin works

- Allows students to review their work for originality before submission
- Provides teachers with an automatic report that flags areas of similar or copied work

Turnitin claims to benefit both teachers and students by providing two primary services.

1. Students can upload their work to the Turnithin website and check for areas that require revision to avoid plagiarism without actually submitting it.
2. the ability for teachers to streamline their revision and grading process by having their students submit their work through Turnitin, which automatically flags potential plagiarism for them without the need to do their own investigating.

For students

When a student uploads a paper to the Turnitin site, the company's software identifies areas of potential plagiarism. The algorithm the software uses compares the text against an extensive corpus. This corpus is a database of web pages, published articles, books, magazines, journals, etc. The database also contains millions of essays previously submitted by students. Turnitin claims that this database contains 165 million journal articles and subscription content sources. In addition, it contains 45 billion web pages as well as over 900 million student papers. Once a student submits a paper to Turnitin, it stays in the company's system indefinitely. Thus, Turnitin can check for the plagiarism using both published authors' works as well as previous students' work. The algorithm can also evaluate originality in a student's work by detecting writing-style differences among student's previous submissions.

For teachers

After the submitted papers have gone through Turnitin's detection software, teachers

receive a report that gives a percentage of the paper that matches other sources. Teachers also receive a version of the student's paper with all similar areas marked and color-coded. The idea is that teachers eventually decide whether any of the flagged instances truly constitute plagiarism. Turnitin only makes this process easier by identifying potential instances for them. As AI tools become more common in education, schools need clear rules for their responsible use. Solutions that support academic integrity in the age of AI help institutions protect originality and fair learning.

Business model of Turnitin

Turnitin charges educational institutions an annual fee to have access to the service. Students of these schools do not have to pay to use the service. Turnitin's pricing is on a per student basis. So, the cost per year will differ across institutions, depending on their size and the number of students enrolled. Turnitin does not provide exact pricing details in its website. However, the cost per student was reported to be around $2 per year in 2012. Assuming no price rise, an institution with 15,000 students can expect to pay around $30,000 a year for Turnitin's software. This business model appears to be profitable for the company as the CEO, Chris Caren has stated that Turnitin has been cashflow positive since 2004. The company reportedly now generates an estimated $127.7 million in annual revenue.

Competitive landscape

Turnitin is approaching 20 years in operation, as its plagiarism prevention service launched in 2000. That means that the company has had nearly 20 years of gathering new sources and student work to add to its database. According to the company, 30 million students from over 15,000 institutions around the world use the tool, contributing to the approximately 929 million student papers in its archive. Consequently, Turnitin outweighs all of its competitors in the anti-plagiarism software space by its sheer size. Although Unicheck, a competing online plagiarism checker, has 1 million users in more than 400 institutions and Academicplagiarism has over 30,000 customers, neither can truly compete with Turnitin's global dominance, which extends to over 140 countries. In terms of its target market, Turnitin differs slightly in that it focuses solely on educational institutions. Unicheck and Copyleaks target personal users, businesses, and educational institutions, while Academicplagiarism targets both, students and schools. Copyleaks and Academicplagiarism, two of Turnitin's top competitors, both use a subscription model,

offering users the ability to choose amongst several different plan options that will allow them to scan a certain number of pages per subscription period. Unicheck offers a similar model to Turnitin, charging institutions a fee based on the number of students served.

Turnitin Acquisition

Turnitin might have some major changes around the corner; the company was acquired by Advance Publications for about $1.75 billion. Advance Publications is a family-owned media conglomerate that owns Conde Nast as well as operates and invests in a broad range of technology, media and communications businesses globally. Industry experts expect this new ownership to usher in change for the platform. As Christopher Nyren, founder of Educated Ventures, put it:

> You don't buy a grading company for almost $2 billion just to keep focusing on grading. So I have to think this is to build out a broader suite [of products].

Caren, Turnitin's CEO, says the company is planning to expand beyond writing into other fields like science and math, in order to become:

> a platform for colleges and high schools to submit all types of student assignments.

Summary

Turnitin has found massive success as an anti-plagiarism software by charging educational institutions on an annual, per-student basis. It will be interesting to see when and how the company will tweak its revenue model in future years as it diversifies its service offering.