Creating a Kickstarter campaign

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Writing a campaign pitch, promoting your project & rewarding pledgers
An interview with the authors of ‘Some wear leather, some wear lace’, Andi Harriman and Marloes Bontje

Why did you choose Kickstarter over other crowdfunding websites?
Andi: At the time (in early 2013) it was the only website available to us. Indiegogo was just starting up, I believe, so Kickstarter seemed to be the only choice.

Marloes: It remains the most well known website that offers this service. We already picked this one until I realized it is rather focused on an American market and credit card holders. European people (especially young people) rarely own such a card and for European fans Kickstarter wasn't the best choice in my opinion. The solution was opening a Paypal account. The currency and pay culture is certainly something to think of when doing international crowdfunding.

How did you approach the writing of the campaign pitch and what important points must you consider when outlining the project?
A: I strategized in the same way I did when writing the book proposal. It had to be clear, concise and interesting for the potential backers. I find it important to make the pitch relatable and make the backer realize how the completion of the project can be a worthwhile thing. That’s how Kickstarters are successful: when they have a story and the story can be engaging to others.

M: I would add that you have to be sure that the pledge gifts you offer are not making you lose too much money. You should end up with enough money for your actual project.
Would you recommend creating a website and Facebook page in line with the project and did you think these resources contributed to the project’s success?
A: Absolutely, both are necessary on so many levels. For one, a real website seems to validate your commitment to a project. Facebook is much better for social media and spreading the word, but it’s also a website that can prove professionalism. Facebook was very helpful - a lot of friends and people from the goth community were willing to spread the word about the book. A lot of it is about trust.

M: Yes. A lot. Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr and a website are essential. For non-social network owners or professional contacts make sure you have a website.

How essential is it to include a video in the campaign?
A: Very. Once again, it’s about validation. From my own experience, I wouldn’t even consider backing a Kickstarter without one. Taking the time to create a video - however short or clunky it is - can be a turning point. Before the campaign, I had never worked with video editing software but I took the hours to learn and I built it from the bottom up. Even though it wasn’t incredibly professional looking, it showed my commitment to the book’s completion. Plus, a lot of people like visuals more than reading text.

M: It gives your project a face. Too much text in your Kickstarter campaign page can demotivate the reader.
How did you promote the campaign?
A: In every imaginable way possible. Facebook was the main platform but we also used blogs, Twitter and whatever other social media platform we could. Every day for 30 days I promoted in any imaginable way possible - there was nothing easy about it.

Is there anything you would have done differently on hindsight?
A: I would like to say yes but I can’t say for sure. Guessing pledge prices was the most difficult thing since before Kickstarter, we had no publisher and no means of guessing what the book’s price would be. All of this was a guessestimate. We needed the funding to purchase photos and figure out how much the production of the book would cost. Looking back, I wish I had just known that Kickstarter is like a loan - you will spend the money and then you still have to send out the pledge awards so it feels like you are losing money. I wish I had known what a long drawn-out process it can be. Though rewarding, you have to keep on top and realize that the campaign is just the beginning.

What were the greatest challenges you experienced during the campaign?
A: As mentioned above, guessing pledge prices and gathering the pledge awards were quite difficult. The goal is to offer something special that the potential backer doesn’t already own but you also want to offer it without losing money.

M: Getting enough pledgers. Also, there is so much more time and money in sending out pledge gifts. This is what we could have done more efficiently, logistically and money-wise. The campaign is not over after a month - it only then begins.
Go further:

Kickstarter project page
https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/postpunkproject/the-postpunk-project

Facebook page
https://www.facebook.com/postpunkproject

Project website
http://www.postpunkproject.com/

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Making your campaign video &
An interview with Vinson Valega, creator of Sharon Louden’s Kickstarter campaign for ‘Living and Sustaining a Creative Life’ book tour

Why did you use Kickstarter over other crowd-funding websites?
Kickstarter has the most cache’ of the others, but it is by no means the only one we could have used. Others would have worked just fine and there are a few out there that are non-profits, which means donations are tax-exempt. We tried Kickstarter first because it’s the biggest with the most exposure. That said, they almost didn’t accept our campaign, since we weren’t asking for support for a ‘product’ or finished art-piece. They actually pressed us for more rationale as to the impact of the book tour. After describing in detail how we planned to reach the widest audience possible, along with the most comprehensive impact, they finally accepted the project. Each site has different criteria when accepting projects, so there might be a better fit out there for funding book tours. In the end, though, Kickstarter worked for us and we were very happy with how it turned out.
How did you prepare for your campaign?
I started off watching Kickstarter videos that were successful and that I liked watching. Since I have been making videos for the past few years (editing in Final Cut Pro), it was easy for me to set up, take b-roll, prep Sharon on what to say, and shoot 2-3 takes, etc. I did have to teach myself another software program (Motion) in order to create the map that animates as Sharon talks about where she wanted to take the book tour across America. That took about 3 straight days of training myself.

What are the key aspects of a successful Kickstarter campaign?
The video is an important aspect of a campaign. Aim to create a video that isn’t too long but is interesting to watch and is not too serious. Add humor if possible. Be extremely grateful to your viewers, as you’re asking them for money. Watch as many other campaign videos as possible to get a sense of what is out there and what works. There are a lot of sites giving advice, not just on the Kickstarter site, so read as much as possible.

How did you promote your Kickstarter page?
We sent the link to all of those on our emailing list, as well as on our Facebook and Twitter pages.

What was the most challenging part of your campaign?
Making videos can be very time consuming but you don’t necessarily have to make it particularly elaborate. When you spend time looking through Kickstarter and other sites, you’ll see what works and
what doesn’t. There are plenty of campaigns that weren't as elaborate as ours that got funded.

If you have one piece of advice that you would want to share with future Kickstarter users, what would it be?
Ask for the right amount of support. If you don't make the amount you're asking for, you lose it all. Fortunately we didn't need to do this, since we made our asking amount plus another $2000 or so, which means we asked for too little. Once you've reached your goal the contributions slow down to a trickle. Had we asked for $10,000, I'm sure we could have reached it. Instead, we asked for $5,000 and received nearly $7,000 in the end.

The other option is to use a site that doesn't require you to meet your goal in order to keep all the money, like Indiegogo.com. But then you lose the "fun factor" or "tension" of reaching your goal, which Kickstarter provides.

Lastly, make sure that you give your contributors "rewards" that mean something. Offer interesting and attractive rewards and keep contributors up-to-date whilst the campaign is progressing, as well as after it has finished. We've kept our contributors informed for the past year. Folks like to hear from you once they give you money!

Go further:

Living and Sustaining a Creative Life Book Tour (Kickstarter video)

Kickstarter handbook
https://www.kickstarter.com/help/handbook

Kickstarter rulebook
https://www.kickstarter.com/rules

Other fundraising sites:

Indiegogo
https://www.indiegogo.com/

CrowdFunder
http://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/

RocketHub
http://www.rockethub.com/
Free video editing software

Windows movie maker
http://www.techradar.com/downloads/windows-movie-maker

iMovie
http://www.apple.com/mac/imovie/

Avidemux
http://avidemux.sourceforge.net/