

Guest Post: How Belinda Kroll Used Kickstarter to Fund Her Book

Posted by Catherine Ryan Howard at [Catherine, Caffeinated](#) on July 18, 2011

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A few weeks back [I was singing the praises of Kickstarter](#) and wondering aloud how self-published writers could use it to fund pre-publication costs like editing and cover design with money generated from what is essentially pre-orders. Self-published author and regular reader **Belinda Kroll** mentioned in the comments that she had done just that, so I asked her to write a guest post about her experience.

Welcome to Catherine, Caffeinated, Belinda! Tell us everything...

“Reader, if there’s one thing you get out of this guest post, it is that nothing comes for free. If you decide to use an indie micro-funding site such as Kickstarter, Indie GoGo, etc, understand it will take a lot of work (i.e. publicity) on your part to get your name out there. But I’m putting the cart before the horse. In this guest post, I intend to break my experience down into: the application, building the project profile page, rewards, publicity, getting funding, and fulfilling the rewards.

Application

My application was part snarky, part earnest. I decided to take this route because I read everything I could about Kickstarter. The application goes to a team of creatives in NYC, and I figured they would appreciate me showing my attitude. The application wanted to know what sort of medium my project was, why I thought it deserved funding, how many days I wanted to run the funding for, and what sort of rewards I intended to send to my backers. My snark came in when I said I might, if my backers were really awesome, do an interpretive dance as a thank you and post it to YouTube.

Thankfully, the Kickstarter approval committee didn’t hold me to that. I might have done it, if allowed to have a paper bag over my head. I waited anxiously for their decision... within a week I got my approval to create a project profile.

Building the Project Profile Page

Once you set the deadline, you cannot change it. That, and the original URL, are the two bits of information that are static once you create them. Everything else is available for updating as the campaign continues. For instance, I created five different video pitches for my project. The first video had low energy, according to friends and family. They wanted to feel energized and excited to

back the project. I did another, and came off too intense and scary. Finally, after fifteen takes, I released a third video talking about my project that would make my book *Haunting Miss Trentwood* a reality.

I rewrote and updated the project description more times than I can count during the campaign. It was an area for me to practice writing the back cover blurb and general publicity language. I even changed the title of the project itself to be more enticing from the Kickstarter search page. This was a constant source of worry.



I used the project blog as a way to keep my backers excited about the campaign's progress. The topics of my updates included everything from how I was creating the book cover, pressure of submitting to multiple distributors online, and even the hassle of shipping and handling bulk packages. Later, my backers told me they loved those updates because they really felt like they were a part of something special. It also provided accountability: I promised I would deliver, and deliver I would.

Rewards

Honestly, I think I kind of low-balled myself with the rewards packages. According to the Kickstarter stats, people tend to bid \$25 without blinking an eye if they like the project. Therefore, you should put your best deal in that backer segment. I forgot to do a cost analysis before building the \$25 reward package, and I'm fairly certain I lost money because of this.

Part of the enticement to pledge \$25 was that backers would get a "surprise." In the last fifteen days of the campaign I updated my backers with photos of the product. It was a coffin-shaped soap that fit perfectly with my Victorian ghost story. When I told my backers about the surprise, a number of them jumped from the \$15 segment to the \$25, which really helped a lot.

Publicity

I was tweeting like crazy, doing the nausea-inducing hard sell that Americans are desensitized to, and everyone else disgusted by. I have no idea if any of my tweets got me a backer. I sent emails to family, friends, and my old English teachers who always said I'd be published someday, both to ask for their interest and to send the message along to readers who might want to pre-order a copy. I talked about it on my blog and my Facebook profile. I chatted about it

at work, after I got over my embarrassment that I was, essentially, asking for money.

The important thing is how you spin it. It's not that you're asking for money, it's that you're trying to find the readers who would be interested in a pre-ordered, signed print copy of a fun book. Sadly, I didn't really believe that until months after I finished my campaign. Luckily, I think my language on the website implied I did.

Getting Funding

When I received funding, I screamed. I had asked for \$1400, and received just a little more than that. I was ecstatic. And then I remembered that Kickstarter takes a certain percentage (5%?) for hosting the project, and Amazon Merchants takes a processing fee for charging all those credit cards. Still, it was enough money for me to pay my editor and buy the print books, magnets, postcards, and soaps that I would ship to the backers.

Fulfilling Rewards

Wow, what a pain this was. I learned so much about fulfillment because I did it incorrectly. I bought the packaging from the postal office rather than the dollar store until I realized I was paying 3x more than I needed to. I didn't learn about the cheap shipping option, media mail (meant for books, cds, magazines only), until halfway through, either. So I was paying 2x the amount for shipping and handling.

I learned the hard way that it's better to label everything and organize the packages based on shipping method BEFORE going to the post office. And for that matter, printing labels is the only way to go when you're sending out 50 packages around the world. Your fingers will thank you later. And then there's the matter of the rewards themselves. People don't need magnets or postcards. I still have piles of them around my apartment, with no idea what to do with them. What a waste of money.

Conclusion

All in all, my Kickstarter experience probably would have been positive no matter what. I learned how much energy goes into a publicity campaign (because really, that's what it is), especially when you don't have a solid plan. If I ever do another project, I will have a plan so I know exactly what information will be sent where. I will send out press releases before I launch the project to get a buzz going. I was also building my author platform during the campaign, which hurt me, a little. Had I a solid platform, I might have had more people helping with publicity.

How Belinda Kroll Used Kickstarter to Fund Her Book at Catherine, Caffeinated

I hope this tell-all was informative for you! I welcome questions, suggestions, and critique. Thanks again, Catherine, for inviting me to talk about my experience!”

Thank YOU, Belinda!

Very interesting and food for thought for many of us, I’m sure. Check out Belinda on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Goodreads](#) and find out more about her work on her [author website](#).

A reminder: you can now order signed copies of [Backpacked](#) on [buybackpackedbook.com](#), along with [Mousetrapped](#) and/or [Self-Printed](#) if you are so inclined. All orders ship with an exclusive preview of my debut novel, [Results Not Typical](#). I know what you’re thinking – next I’ll be bringing out a pyramid of Ferreo Rocher.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Belinda Kroll is a published author under multiple names. She resides in Central Ohio with many, many, delicious books. She drinks gallons of tea a week, which may or may not be a gross overstatement.

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