

Creative Backing

By Kevin Joy for The Columbus Dispatch on Sunday, October 3, 2010

Entrepreneurs have found a new way to fund projects. Discouraged by big-media gatekeepers or a lack of professional connections, plenty of creative types are taking their aspirations to Kickstarter - a website that has helped about 3,000 people pay for projects since its April 2009 inception.

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The idea had churned in his head for years - a supernatural, comic-style book on Victorian-era serial killer Jack the Ripper.

In the spring, history buff and swing-punk musician Wolfgang Parker decided to turn the project into a reality.

Money, though, was a problem.

The 35-year-old from the Clintonville neighborhood estimated the startup costs at \$6,000, which would pay artists and letterers in Canada, Australia and the Philippines.

Parker surpassed his goal in May, thanks to donations from friends and strangers alike - channeled through a New York website dubbed Kickstarter.

Work has begun on *1888*, a 175-page book he plans to complete by 2012.

He is flattered by the Kickstarter response, said Parker, who, to maintain the rights, opted not to seek traditional funding from a publisher.

"At no time did I look at this as something that was owed to me," he said. "I look at this as an opportunity to show what I can do."

Plenty of other creative types, discouraged by big-media gatekeepers or a lack of professional connections, are taking their aspirations to Kickstarter - which has helped about 3,000 people pay for projects since its April 2009 inception, co-founder Yancey Strickler said.

The site's mechanics are simple: hopefuls from around the globe submit proposal requests, each of which are reviewed and approved (or rejected) by Strickler and co-founder Perry Chen.

Kickstarter receives about 150 pitches a day. The company wouldn't disclose its acceptance rate but said creative projects focused on the arts aren't likely to face dismissal.

Those who pass muster set a timetable of up to 90 days and bolster their cause with a homemade video and details on a personal Kickstarter page.

"It's not a donation model," said Strickler, 31. "It's much closer to patronage. People are excited to get in collectively with something that's involved."

The Web's far reach offers an advantage.

"You're crowd-sourcing the entire world," said Belinda Kroll, an Upper Arlington Kickstarter user trying to raise \$1,500 by Oct. 15 to self-publish her historical novel, *Haunting Miss Trentwood*.

"It's not just this one individual trying to get an idea out there. Everyone has a part in that project."

Kroll wrote her first book at age 17 and printed 150 copies with a \$400 boost from her parents. Now, the 25-year-old wants her second work to benefit from a copy editor and an ISBN number to allow commercial sales - which could cost about \$600.

Cheong-ah Hwang, an artist from Merion Village, recently exceeded her \$250 Kickstarter goal to reproduce archival prints and greeting cards of her layered paper sculptures based on the story of *Little Red Riding Hood*.

"I want it to have exposure," said Hwang, 40, a stay-at-home mom whose parents ran a printing shop during her childhood in South Korea. "I wanted to see the reaction from people. I would like to keep making illustrations."

As they do in public-radio fundraisers, more generous Kickstarter donors typically receive greater perks. Those who give Kroll \$5, for example, will receive a digital PDF copy of the finished book. Pledge \$50, and get three print copies, a mention in the book's acknowledgments section and a handwritten thank-you note.

Kickstarter contributions are low-risk. Donors, who use an online payment system hosted by retailer Amazon.com, aren't charged if a project doesn't reach its projected targets.

Daryl Danforth was intrigued enough by Parker's *1888* project that he ultimately donated \$1,275 - enough that likenesses of both himself and his 6-year-old daughter will be featured as characters in the book's story line.

Danforth, 40, of West Springfield, Mass., is familiar with Parker's music but doesn't know him personally.

"I had never heard of Kickstarter before this project, but I trusted Wolfgang's vision and was thrilled with the preliminary artwork," Danforth said.

Although the new concept reflects how younger people might support a cause, it isn't foolproof, said Daniel Borochoff, president of the American Institute of Philanthropy, a Chicago-based charity watchdog.

"This is allowing the little guy to be able to be a backer of the arts in a small way and feel connected," Borochoff said. "On the other hand, there is little to no assurance as to whether the money will be spent as advertised."

Kickstarter keeps 5percent of the totals raised. Strickler wouldn't say whether the website, which employs 14, has yet become profitable.

He estimated that half of Kickstarter projects don't raise enough money to succeed.

A recent proposal by Columbus producer Brenda Barton fell far short of its \$12,000 target to fund a short film about the effects of the military's "Don't ask, don't tell" policy on families.

"We basically set our goal way too high," said Barton, 52. "We know everybody's out there asking for money. There's so much white noise out there."

Barton, a federal employee by day, plans to scale back her request and try again on Indiegogo.com, a similar site based in San Francisco that doesn't screen applicants or penalize those who fail to find total funding.

Heather Wirth had better luck seeing her idea, a traveling art classroom titled Columbus Artmobile, to fruition.

In May, she raised \$1,000 via Kickstarter, which she uses to fund and supply daytime and after-school art programs open to all at the ARTillery space inside South Campus Gateway.

Motivated by her own art-class experiences as a child, Wirth sought an option for at-risk and homeschooled kids.

More than a dozen area artists have since volunteered to help. She plans to raise more money to purchase a small school bus.

"A lot of people are tired about having funding for humanities cut," said Wirth, 34. "I think this says a lot about citizens and grass-roots operations."

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To learn more about Kroll's Kickstarter project, [click here](#).

Email [Kevin Joy](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Belinda Kroll is a published author under multiple names. She is a word nerd, history geek, and computer dork. She is a user researcher/usability analyst by day and a historical fiction writer by and night. 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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