The Secrets to a Successful Kickstarter Campaign

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Introduction

Kickstarter is a “crowdfunding” website in which people propose projects that they want to complete, and offer up some form of rewards in exchange for money to a large number of people.

In the summer of 2014, I ran my first Kickstarter campaign. Before I began the campaign I read everything I could find on Kickstarter. I analyzed and discussed and shared and agonized over my campaign. In the end, I did some things right: I was a Kickstarter Project of the Day, became a Staff Pick and was mentioned in their newsletter. I also made some mistakes. What struck me most, however, was how little actual information there was out there about some aspects of Kickstarter that would have been really useful for me to know in advance. And even more than that, I was unaware when I began that I would be bombarded by messages from people asking me “how is it that you are so successful? What am I doing wrong?”

The campaign ended at the end of September 2014 with a final tally of $61,606: over $20,000 above my original goal. I was ecstatic and exhausted. Immediately, people said to me: “You need to write about your success. You need to share this.” And after a few months of reflection, I decided that I did, indeed, have something to offer my fellow crowdfunding hopefuls, and so I began this book as a guide to a successful Kickstarter campaign. I’m sure that there are tactics here that are useful for other crowdsourcing sites—IndieGogo, and so on, but my focus here is based on Kickstarter, where my own experience lies.

There’s Gold in Them There Hills!

In addition to being an educator, I have been and still do work in the tech industry. I worked for a start-up in the late 1990s during the dot-com boom, where everyone with a half-baked idea saw money pouring in and everyone rushed to join before the bubble burst. And as competition increased and ideas failed to bear fruit, the money rapidly dried up and many people who thought they would be overnight millionaires found themselves unemployed. Then, I watched the same thing happen with the App Store, where the first apps out the gate made a lot of money very quickly, and stories of someone working for a week on an app to make $50,000 or more were whispered like “everyone can do this”. And of course, that didn’t last very long either. And so it was no real surprise to me that the same thing is playing out in the crowdfunding world. Gone are the days when you can simply put up a webpage and wait for people to come to you. Does it happen? Sure, once in a while, but the real secret to success on Kickstarter should be no secret: It’s a heck of a lot of work. And it’s not cheap. And even then, you need a great idea and a little luck on your side. More than half (about 55%) of all Kickstarter campaigns fail, and I expect that this percentage will increase as more and more projects get created and the press get tired of covering the stories and people get tired of funding all their friends’
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ideas. You have to work hard to be heard above the noise, and you need to do your homework to do that.

As the saying goes, it takes ten years to become an overnight success. I’m not saying that you need to wait ten years to begin your campaign, but that what you’ve done up to now and what you do between now and your launch will influence the outcome of your campaign: How many friends and acquaintances you have, how many organizations and groups you’re active in online or in the real world, and how your experience and reputation relate to your project all matter. If you’re not active or involved in anything, you’re probably not the kind of person crowdfunding a project, because in my experience teams of people active in their communities create most of the projects. But in case you are a solo basement dweller without much involvement in the world, there are still things you can do. I estimate that a good campaign takes at least six months lead time, a month of full-time work during the campaign, and a minimum of $1000 to prepare, unless you’ve got lots of really talented friends to help out.

Who this book is for
I’ve written this book with the first-time crowdfunder in mind. That’s not to say that someone who has failed or even succeeded in a Kickstarter campaign already won’t find anything useful here: I believe that there are many useful tips I’ve included. What I mean is, you may be new to Kickstarter and are exploring your options, or you’ve been a backer for a while but you haven’t a clue how campaigns are put together and organized.

I’ve also designed this for someone who may not be all that tech-savvy. I’m a geek and spend my days writing code or making creative applications and I’ve been that way since I was a toddler. I recognize, however, that not everybody has that kind of tech experience, and so I’ve tried to keep this really simple to follow.

I can’t teach you everything in this book—I won’t go into details on editing your campaign video, for instance—but I believe that this book will cover what you need to know, and if you can’t figure out the rest, you at least know what you need to know, and can call in the cavalry to help you out at those points!

How this book is organized
This book is designed to give you an overview of what you should be doing at each stage over the six months leading up to your campaign launch, and how it works when you are finished.

It will be useful for you not to wait until the next stage to read up on what you’re doing, but read the entire book ahead of your journey, so that you can think ahead and plan out what you need to do and why.

I’ve listed tasks at the end of each section of the book, but it should also be noted that some of these are approximate guidelines when it comes to timing. You may not
have six months to wait until you launch, and you’re itching to get going in a few weeks: It’s not impossible, it’s just a lot of work to do at once. My six-month lead-up timeline is designed for someone who is working a full-time day job and doesn’t have 40 hours a week to put into a campaign. You may have more time to devote and may be able to tackle some of the tasks on a much shorter timeline. However, in my experience, letting ideas percolate for a while, gathering feedback and iterating on an idea, is far better than leaving things until the last minute! (Now if only I could convince my students of that fact!).
Phase 1: Six Months Ahead of Your Campaign

Many people who contacted me during my campaign wanting to know how I’d been so successful. What was the magic bullet that their campaign was missing? They had many of the right ingredients on the “front end” of their campaign: the pages looked great, they’d thought things through clearly, and so on. But as I always explained to them, it’s not just what you see that makes other people’s campaigns successful: It’s what you don’t see going on behind the scenes of a campaign that makes it work.

This behind-the-scenes work should start at least six months ahead of your planned campaign. In this Chapter, I’ll present just a few of the ideas that will help you in the lead-up to your campaign proper. I’d encourage you to think outside the box about how else you can take these same steps, because I’m sure I didn’t think of everything!

Six months ahead of time, your goals should be as follows:
1. Join and learn about the Kickstarter community
2. Think about how you can build your own reputation
3. Build a project website
4. Begin to build buzz about the project on social media
5. Build your campaign team
6. Begin planning your project’s campaign

I’ll go through in detail how to do these steps as well as why you should take these steps in detail now. But first you may be thinking “wait a minute, six months?” Yes, I’d say six months at a minimum, to prepare for a campaign. Remember I said that it would be a lot of work? Well that work starts now, today. The sooner, the better. Some of these steps can wait a few more months, but the first two are critical to start now unless you’re already famous and then you can ignore this entire book and go make $6,000,000 like Neil Young!

If you’ve already got a strong reputation in your field and many followers, you can probably do this step much closer to your launch, but I’m assuming that most of the readers of this book probably aren’t well-known and can use the lead-up time. Take the time to get your campaign right, because you don’t want to have to do it twice!

Step One: Joining the Kickstarter Community

The first key to this step is in the title, and it begins with the word community. Kickstarter is a community. It’s built around people helping other people. You need to get involved in Kickstarter to get a better sense of how it all works.

1. Sign up for a Kickstarter account. The first step you want to take in this journey, if you haven’t already, is to sign up for a Kickstarter account!
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Figure 1.1: Kickstarter signup

There are a few things to note here:

- You can change your name up until you launch your campaign, but once you launch a campaign yourself, you cannot change your name.

- In my experience (and I made this mistake myself), using your own name is better than using a company name. The main reason for this is that people tend to back other people, as much as their ideas. A company is less personal, and being less personal gets in the way of that sense of community. It’s not a hard and fast rule, however, and one exception to this rule should be where a company name is beneficial in the sense that
  - you really are a group of people, or
  - you want people to look you up by company name, not personal name for some reason.

- Use a picture of you, not a company logo, for the same reason. Make sure it’s a good picture with you smiling, and if possible doing something related to your planned campaign topic area.

- Leave the “Discover projects with our weekly newsletter” box checked when you sign up. You’ll get a summary every week of the kinds of projects that Kickstarter staff are interested in, and can check out the projects to see how they positioned themselves. This will be important later!

2. Once you’ve signed up, build your profile right away. Then if you back other projects, those people will have a little information about you and, if you build a website soon, also will have access to information about your project!
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See, you’re building a reputation already! In the top right corner of your screen you’ll see a button called Me with a down arrow. Here you will be able to find in the future messages, track your activity and backing history, and also edit your profile. Click on the Settings> Edit Profile link. Your profile turns up in several places in several different sizes and shapes, so be sure to check them all out and see that they work for you.

![Figure 1.2: A blank profile page.](image)

3. Your profile page should have your picture, which other people will be able to view. You can also set your location here. Your personal profile location influences what shows up on Kickstarter for Local to You.
Figure 1.3: Another view of my bio: note the different size/shape of photo, the slightly longer (but not full) view of my bio.

4. Your biography is really important. This is not somewhere to tell people you like long walks on the beach (unless your project is about long walks on the beach!). It’s also not a place for your resume. It’s somewhere in-between these two: Your current position, some achievements you’re proud of, and your interests are useful here. Be sure to spell-check it! I once backed a project out of pity for someone who claimed to be abroad teaching English but whose own English was sadly lacking, and even after I contacted them and suggested they may want to change it to look a bit more professional and able to carry out their project, it was still rife with errors. Show your professionalism by running it through a spell-check!
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5. A vanity URL is useful for when you create your project page; it will give you a name by which to link to your project. Here is where you can put your company name if you’re using a company instead of a personal name. When you create your project later, it will be easy to link to by setting a vanity URL. Note that you can’t change it later, so if you can’t decide right now, leave it blank.

Figure 1.5: Signup settings
6. Websites: If you haven’t got a project website yet, you can always edit this later. But if you do have a project website, now is the time to enter it. When you back a project, someone may look at your profile, and then go look at your project website, so it never hurts to have this set up ready (see below).

7. Find Friends: Finding Friends will connect your account to Facebook. This can be a good or bad thing, depending on how many Facebook friends you have and how likely they are to back you. Personally, I didn’t connect to Facebook, but if you have lots of supportive friends and no real reputation out there online, it won’t hurt. I say supportive friends because sometimes when people contacted me and said “Hey, can you look at my project and tell me what I’m doing wrong?” and I’d look and the first thing I’d notice is that they had 750 Facebook friends but only 10 people backed them after 2 weeks. If you have 750 “friends” and only 10 of them will support your project, you don’t have 750 friends! You have 10 friends. That makes me, as a backer, concerned that you’ve spammed a bunch of people to make it look like you have lots of friends/contacts when really, anyone can spend a day on Facebook and make 750 “friends”. As I said, though, if you have people as friends who are active in the crowdfunding community and who post, themselves, about projects they’re backing or are creating projects themselves, linking accounts may be helpful to get word out.

8. View your profile: Take a look at how it looks to others by saving the changes you’ve made then looking at your profile (use the Me> Profile) link. On the right you’ll see a pinwheel that will be currently empty. Each piece of the pie represents a category on Kickstarter, and backing projects in different categories will get them filled in.

9. Once you’re all set up, it’s time to back some projects. Find projects that you like. Find ones you’re sure will succeed, and some you know will likely fail. Back a bunch of projects in different categories to get those pinwheel colours on your profile page lit up (each piece of the pie represents a category):

Figure 1.6: My basic profile page. My username here is my company name, Ehtonal. Looking back, I wish I’d used my own name, but it was too late once we launched! Note that my profile has a link to my project, shows what I’ve
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backed and created, and only has one line of my bio showing. I’ve backed projects in many, but not all categories, so my pinwheel is getting full but not complete yet.

There are several reasons for backing projects at this stage:
   a. Some backers (myself included) won’t back projects by creators who haven’t backed a bunch of projects themselves. Like I said above, Kickstarter is a community, and if you’re not willing to help other people achieve their dreams, why should anyone be willing to help you achieve yours?
   b. It’s very useful to watch a campaign unfold—both the successful and unsuccessful. Watch the timing of their updates, the contact they have with you, and follow their progress throughout their campaign. You can learn a lot by watching both successful and unsuccessful campaigns. Are they contacting you every day with an update? Is it annoying or do you want to follow the progress regularly? Are they following up after the campaign is over, or do they let things slide? (Some Kickstarter creators, sadly, will fail to deliver on the goods, or be several years late. You’re not going to be one of those people I know, but you need to feel the pain of that rip-off to understand why you’re not going to be one of those people!)
   c. Get to know the Kickstarter interface and how it all works. By backing a few projects you may learn some important things that otherwise you may not know about Kickstarter such as:
      i. You don’t have to back the amounts given in the rewards section. You can pick anything. So you can go back 30 projects for $1 and they’ll all show up as backed projects. People don’t know how much you backed a project for, so it’s up to you how much you want to contribute, and they’ll still count towards your backed projects count.
      ii. You can change, and cancel your pledge, at any time up to the end of the campaign. (And, sadly, even afterwards, but more on that later)
      iii. You’ll get updates sent to your email about the project (which you can opt out of).

You really need to experience Kickstarter for a few months to get the hang of it all, and to build your own Kickstarter reputation, so get started on this part today!
Figure 1.7: Pledging to a Kickstarter project. Note that in some cases the payment defaults to an Amazon check-out. This seems to occur when you’re not in the same country as the project creator.

Figure 1.8: After you’ve pledged, you’re taken to an option to Tweet or share on Facebook that you backed the project. It is always good to show your followers that you’re active in the community, so tweet that out! You will also note that you are shown projects that you may also like. This will come in useful when your own project is up on Kickstarter, because some people will come to your page through similar projects. It helps, then, if you can have a project that is similar to something else running at the same time, because you can capitalize on their success, too. If you’re not in a hurry, you may want to wait until you see someone launch something similar.

**Step Two: Think about how you can build your own reputation**

I mentioned Neil Young above for a reason: He can put up a campaign asking for $800,000 and get over $6,000,000 because he’s Neil Young. The rest of us don’t have that kind of name or reputation to trade on. That doesn’t mean, however, that we
can get away with having no reputation! I’m convinced a large part of my own Kickstarter success, besides all the work that went into it, is because people understood where I was coming from, people knew me and trusted me. People could say “Oh, yeah, that’s someone who gets projects done. And I like her work”. People contacted me saying they’d read my books or saw me lecture, and they were backing me because they believed in me. Now, I’ve spent twenty years building up my reputation in my work, and I was posting a project relating to that community, so it was relatively easy for me to use my reputation. So here’s where you need to begin: Are you making a project that is related to your day job, or hobby you’ve been doing for some time, or is this something totally out of the blue? If you’re a bank manager and you want funding to start your life again as an oil painter, you may have a hard time convincing people that you’re going to follow through on your project unless you’ve been really actively trying to be an oil painter in your spare time for a number of years.

Reputation building, in my experience, involves years of volunteer work. I serve on several advisory boards, editorial boards, conference committees, and I’ve volunteered my time for various industry organizations for years. That kind of work is often done “without reward”, in the sense that you don’t immediately see the payoff, but getting involved in your community is critical to your success not just on Kickstarter, but in life in general. Gone are the days of being laid off and walking into a new job right away: everything is about connections, and you need to work on finding and maintaining these connections.

OK, so what if you have no connections right now? How do you get started and get a reputation in six months? I am assuming that you have some background in your project’s area, because it’s a little nuts to try to start straight out of the blue, so here are some suggestions:

1. Join online groups and get active: LinkedIn, Yahoo Groups, Google Plus, Facebook, and various organizations have online groups that you can become a part of. Don’t just lurk: ask questions, give answers, just get visible. Use your real name.

2. Similarly, join online forums related to your subject and try to help other people. Go in with useful discussion questions and helpful answers. Use your real name!

3. Start a blog, podcast, or other similar site relating to your project area. Want to make a potato salad? Start a blog of potato salad recipes. Make a weekly podcast of interviews with your grocer and a farmer down the road. Whatever! Just get content out there with your name on sooner rather than later.

4. If you’re not already on social media, it’s time to start! Same as the points above—start tweeting about potato salad. Make useful Tweets. Get a Facebook page and invite your friends (see below). Get a Twitter following (see below) and revamp your Linkedin profile to reflect your new direction. You want people to recognized you as the potato salad person.
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5. Offer your advice—seek out newspaper articles or other blog posts relating to your topic. Comment on those—using your real name—and don’t spam! Just offer really good, effective, useful advice and help to authors and commentators. If your topic is something of interest to local colleges, universities, libraries, or community groups, find out who is in charge of your area of specialty and call them up and tell them you’re looking to get some more experience with public speaking and you’re available to do talks at no charge. I’d love it if someone phoned me up and said they’d like to come in and do a guest lecture in my class. So don’t be afraid of contacting professors. They may not all agree with me, but it’s not like we’re getting people regularly contacting us volunteering their time! We’re all overworked and love for our students to have contact with the community.

6. Volunteer in organizations relating to your project. Join the Potato Farmers’ Association of Ontario or the local chapter of Potato Salad Fanatics. Find out what they need help with and help them.

Your goals here are to become known as someone active in this area. You want people to recognize your name as being someone seriously involved in potato salad. You want your name to come up affiliated with potato salad six months from now if someone does a Google search on you, or on potato salad, for that matter. You want to be all over the potato salad world online and offline. Six months from now, the people helping you out on your campaign will be the people you help out today. What goes around, it comes around, as Bob Marley so rightly sang.

**Step Three: Build a project website**

Your project needs a website. You can only fit so much on your Kickstarter page, and you only want to fit so much on it (more on this later). Your website will have all the other information that anyone might want, including expanded biographies of not just you but your entire team, as well as more images, video, and whatever else might help sell your project. You also need to tell people on the front page that you will be running a Kickstarter campaign in the future (if you’ve got a launch date in mind, set up a countdown or give them the month of start date) and if you think you’re going to get enough traffic, set up a newsletter they can sign up for, or at the very least link back to your Twitter/Facebook pages so they can follow you for updates. You need to rally a lot of people at the start of your campaign, so building a website is an important step to gathering some troops at the ready!

You also want to get your website up now, because as you go volunteering for these organizations or posting online in groups about your subject, people are going to Google you. You need them to find out what you’re up to. You may not have all the materials you need yet, but you can keep adding these as you go. It also helps if you can keep a page at the ready with a press release/press kit (more on this later) as well as information on your appearances (in print/radio, etc. and in person) to help to establish you as an expert and active person in this area.
If you’ve never built a website before, it’s advisable to get some professional help here. Nothing will sink a project faster than a poorly designed website. You can figure things out yourself and use a well-designed pre-made template if you have some basic web skills but no design skills, but make sure you actually have a decent design. I saw one Kickstarter project’s website with black and white photoshopped images with lens flares on them. Lens flares, if you don’t know, were really popular on the web in…. oh, I think it was 1995. Yeah. Get some help with your design. The web is a visual medium and if your visuals say “yuck”, nobody is going to stick around long enough to hear your story!

Get a proper domain name, and a proper website to show that you’re serious and professional. These won’t cost very much—I pay about $80 USD for an annual domain and web hosting package. You can find free web hosting packages, and if all you’re doing is having a really simple site without a whole lot of traffic, this may be an option for you. Beware of free hosting sites that put ads on your page, though: you don’t need any visual clutter taking away from your careful design work, and you don’t want people clicking through to other sites from your own until they’ve spent the time you need for them to learn about you. If you’re serious, then it’s worth getting a serious site together. Domain names can also appear cheap on some sites, but be sure they include a webmail option (e.g. info@DoePotatoes.com) and Domain Name Server, or DNS, forwarding to your website host. The reason is, you may buy a domain name, but if it won’t forward to your website, then anyone going to www.DoePotatoes.com will find just an “under construction” sign or ad for your domain provider. That provider may then gouge you on forwarding costs later, particularly if you’re not buying a hosting package with them. If that all sounds very confusing, just buy a web hosting package with a domain name included. I use HostMDS (https://www.hostmds.com) in part because they’re local to me (Toronto), and in part because that’s who I chose originally, about ten years ago when I bought my domain name so I’ve just stuck with them. There are many options for you—another site I host is on GoDaddy (http://www.godaddy.com), but beware the price increase after the first year!
A good web designer will charge you anywhere from $500 and up for a simple site, usually on this low end if you’re willing to just hand them the text, images, and a template that you like. You can also hire someone remotely quite cheaply online if you have all of these things at the ready, using websites like elance (http://www.elance.com) or odesk (http://www.odesk.com). And if you’re really not comfortable with that either, I recommend taking a course on Udemy or Lynda.com on building a website using whatever software package you can get your hands on (Dreamweaver or Muse, for instance), but make sure to get a trusted second opinion on your design, and buy or find a really nice, modern template and don’t deviate from the colours that designer has chosen, such as from Themeforest (http://www.themeforest.net).
At this point you may want to also consider hiring a graphic designer. Not only will you need your Kickstarter page to be well designed, but you’ll also need the material you’re rewarding backers with to be attractive! You may have a cousin “who can draw”, but chances are you need a professional here as well. You want people to really want your widgets or your potato salad recipes, but if you’re offering a really ugly t-shirt with potato salad recipes on, they’re probably not going to give you their money. It is really worth investing in a good designer now to make sure that what you’re offering is really appealing. If you’re on a really tight budget, try your local college or university graphics/art department. You can offer students less, usually, but please don’t hold a contest to make them all submit work unpaid, and don’t offer them nothing. I trained as an artist, and I know sometimes the most simple designs can take the most planning and preparation. You might think “well, I could have drawn that in 10 minutes” but that’s not how it works. You could draw that in ten minutes after five years of training and three weeks of thinking and sketching out designs. Someone with a good eye is critical to your entire campaign, so make friends with someone quickly, because you’re going to need them again later! Pay people. Don’t offer them exposure or a cut of the takings. People deserve to get paid to do work for your company.

You also need to add a Paypal donate button to your website. Not only will you get a few random donations, if you’re lucky, but later on in your campaign there will be backers whose payment for whatever reason just won’t work through Kickstarter and they’ll want another option to donate, or people who just missed the campaign but want to support you right after the project.

If you don’t yet have a PayPal account, now is the time to create one. The instructions can be found here: https://www.paypal.com/us/cgi-bin/?cmd=_donate-intro-outside
Note that to have a non-profit status you must be a registered non-profit. You can also accept payments online for a small percentage that PayPal takes to process the payments. https://www.paypal.com/us/webapps/mpp/accept-payments-online
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Step Four: Begin to build buzz about the project on social media

As with building your reputation and website, you need to start early on social media to make people aware of both you and your project. If you’re not already on social media, now is the time to get started. I recommend at least Twitter and Facebook. And if you are already on social media, depending on how closely related your project is to your personal or business account, you may want to consider a separate account and page for your Kickstarter project. I set up a new Twitter account just for my Kickstarter project despite having a good following with another account, because I knew I’d be sending out lots of information relating to the Kickstarter campaign and didn’t want to lose my following by annoying them with too many messages off-topic from my regular business posts.

Getting started with Twitter

Twitter is a great way to reach masses of people, but at the same time, there are masses of people trying to reach those masses of people, and it’s easy to get lost in the shuffle. I’m no marketing expert, but I can offer a few tips here to get you started. It’s important to establish a following before your Kickstarter campaign launch, both to build your reputation, as well as build up a useful group of people who are
interested in your project and ideas—your community. Your goal, on Twitter, is to get as many people following you who are genuinely interested in your project/ideas/you as possible. These people are your bread and butter. It doesn’t matter if you have 20,000 followers on Twitter if they’re random people who are only following you to boost their own list of followers. What matters is that your followers are all engaging with you and your ideas.

First, sign up for an account by choosing a name that describes your project best in as few characters as you can manage, create an attractive profile page, and learn the basics of Tweeting. [https://twitter.com/](https://twitter.com/)

![Figure 1.12 The brief Twitter bio that you get that shows to other users what you’re about. Choose the words carefully, and choose an attractive picture.](image1)

![Figure 1.13 My project profile page: bio, location, link, and images, along with recent Tweets are shown.](image2)
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Content—what to Tweet?
Like every other community on the web, Twitter has its own etiquette and ways to use it. Nobody likes a pile of sales pitches, and if your posts are only about your campaign, most people will not want to follow you. A good general rule of thumb is to have less than one in five of your posts be campaign/sales messages. For instance, if your campaign is to put together a potato salad, then grab potato salad recipes off the web and review them. Find quotes about potatoes. Find something interesting about potatoes and share it. Don’t make every post about your Kickstarter campaign, because that will get annoying very quickly.

One way that I gather useful content is with Google’s Search Tools. On the Google search page, you will see the Search Tools link. You can search a topic by time period, picking the last 24 hours. So I can do a search for “potato salad” every morning and look at what has been posted online in the past day. Then I can tweet about any articles that may be relevant to my followers. It’s a great way for them to keep up on the news—they know I’ll be posting a lot of great news and keeping them up to date, and it only takes a few minutes of my time to grab a few links, quickly scan them and make a pithy comment, throw that in Buffer and I’m done with my own content for the day unless there’s some retweets or replies I’m going to get into.

When to Tweet
If you don’t have time to log in several times a day to post these great interesting items, you can use Buffer (http://www.bufferapp.com) to “buffer” posts for several hours, so you can tweet every four or six or ten hours, regardless of where you actually are at that time. If you have many tweets, this is a great way to spread them out. Too many tweets in a row can put people off, so after you’ve tweeted one or two, buffer the next few so you can spread them out a bit. Remember too that very few people are sitting reading their Twitter feed all day: Spreading tweets out during the day means that you can catch more people who are coming on from different time zones or different times of the day (during/after work, etc.). I’ve read that the most successful time to Tweet in English is 9am Pacific time, since it catches all of North America and Europe, and Australia all during day/evening hours.

You will also want to think about where your followers are. If you have an EU-based project relating to a specific European potato, then Tweet at a time of day when those people are likely to be reading Twitter: If you’re in North America and tweeting at night, then Europeans have all gone to bed and you’re wasting your tweets. There are all kinds of Twitter analytics you can get into once you get going: https://analytics.twitter.com or third party tools: Twtrland http://twtrland.com/), Twitonomy (http://www.twitonomy.com/) and others can help you to see which posts are getting traction with your followers, help you find new followers, find
mentions and hashtags, get insights on your tweets, and so on.

Getting Followers

Hashtags (words starting with a hash sign, #) are useful only if you are also part of a subgroup community who follow that hashtag. Use them sparingly: People will generally do searches for topics by hashtags, so if you are posting a lot of sales pitches to the #potatosalad followers, you’re going to annoy people. On the other
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hand, if you’re posting something that #potatosalad followers might be interested in, then by all means, that’s a great way to get new people to follow you.

Another way to get new people to follow you is to talk to them via including their handle, which starts with the @ sign. @PotatoKing, for instance, in a post, if there is something that relates to them. Let’s say @PotatoKing just won the world potato eating contest. You could write a Tweet saying “Congratulations to @PotatoKing for winning the World Potato Eating Contest #potatosalad” for example.

Or, you can respond to someone else’s post. Let’s say you do a Twitter search (on the Twitter website) for #potatosalad and someone named @PotatoFamine has Tweeted that the “ultimate recipe for potato salad contains pickle” you could reply by saying “Potato salad recipe with pickle? I say yuck: My secret ingredient is beets @PotatoFamine #potatosalad”. @PotatoFamine, and their followers, can now see your Tweet.

You can also re-Tweet (forward) someone’s tweet to your own followers, and it will show up in the original Tweeter’s feed. It’s correct etiquette to include the handle of the original Tweeter with an “RT” (retweet) in any retweets you do. “RT @PotatoFamine ultimate recipe for potato salad contains pickle. #potatosalad”

You will find that if you are posting interesting content and engaging with people through mentioning them in posts, you will get people following you at a slow but steady rate.

One way of getting more followers is to follow people yourself. Go easy on this—and if you follow too many people in a day, Twitter will temporarily lock you out of your account. You want to follow the people that you want to follow you back. In other words, you want to follow people who are relevant and may support your campaign. Following random people just to get your numbers up won’t actually help you. So I may go to the #potatosalad search results and see who posts anything about potato salad and follow them. I may look at their followers and see if there are more potato lovers and follow those people too. But if they follow 100,000 people I know they’re never going to see my tweets even if they follow me. They’re just looking for numbers, not to engage with you.

Another way to get more followers is to do some deep digging and find the Twitter handles of people who are backing a similar project on Kickstarter. When you back a project you usually have the option to Tweet “I just backed Project BlahdeBlah on Kickstarter kick.st/blah”. You can do a search for that link that to find people backing a project that is similar to your own, and follow those people. Some will follow you back, particularly if your profile page on Twitter is interesting.

You want to be cautious that you don’t just follow too many people, as described above, because you want to engage with your followers, and following too many people will make it difficult for you to do that, because you'll be forever wading through sales pitches and spam of all the messages you get if you follow too many
people who aren’t relevant to you. You can’t really follow thousands of people unless you have no day job, because you’d just be watching your feed all day to keep up.

Once you’ve followed a bunch of people, after a few days you can use a free website like “Friend or Follow” (https://friendorfollow.com/) to see who followed you back, and then stop following people who didn’t follow you back. I like Friend or Follow because it doesn’t demand that you keep tweeting their name. Some free follower services automatically tweet on your behalf, which gets annoying.

You will get random companies and people following you for their sole purpose of hoping that you will follow them back, and making it look like they have a huge following. When I first joined Twitter I was followed by someone who had over 20,000 followers. I thought that they must be important so I followed them back. Not only did they only ever Tweet sales pitches, but I quickly realized that they were also following over 20,000 people! There’s no way they can engage with that many people, so all they were doing was trying to get people to follow them back, to look important and spread their sales slime.

Follow people back if they are relevant and you want to follow them. Don’t follow them for any other reason, because having 20,000 people who ignore your Tweets is certainly no better than having 10 people who hang on your every word! It takes a long time to build up a good following of people who are interested and engaged with you, so start right away!

**Getting started with Facebook pages**

Most people have a Facebook page, and Facebook is a useful way for people to keep up with your project if they don’t have a Twitter feed or don’t read Twitter all the time. You can set up a separate “PAGE” for a project, so that people can “like” your page and get updates, without having to Friend you.

https://www.facebook.com/about/pages
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Figure 1.16 An early Facebook page for my project

Pages are the best way to keep in contact with people without them seeing family photos and finding out you just went camping with your dog. Note that you cannot control who ‘likes’ your page, and people can comment on the page without your prior approval, although I’ve never experienced any abuse. Like Twitter, though, Facebook page followers are certainly no guarantee of translations into sales on your Kickstarter page. I know people who have thousands of “likes” on their Facebook page, but couldn’t convince more than 10% of those people to support their Kickstarter project.

Set up a page for the project, and get some interesting pictures and profile up. A quick timesaver for you will be to link that new page to Twitter. Your Tweets can be posted directly to your page via Twitter, so you don’t need to post things in two places. It’s a little tricky to connect Twitter to a Facebook page rather than your profile so I’ll walk you through that here:

Everything is done inside Twitter here. Select your Settings page and click on “Apps”. Select Connect to Facebook (you’ll need to be logged into Facebook already or it will prompt you for your login information). Select the privacy settings that you want. It will connect to your personal account. That’s OK. When you’ve gone through all of the privacy settings, go into your Apps Settings and grant Twitter the right to “manage pages” permission for your Facebook personal profile. Now you can select your page, instead of your personal profile.

It’s also useful to see what people “like” on your page, so that you can gauge engagement with your content. Again, there are all kinds of analytics that you can get into if you’re interested in trying to maximize your time and get more people to “like” your page such as Facebook’s Page Insights,

https://www.facebook.com/help/336893449723054
And a few more are: [http://likealyzer.com/], Simply Measured ([http://simplymeasured.com/](http://simplymeasured.com/)) Plans start at a whopping $500 a month but they do have some free reports)

Figure 1.17 Simply Measured: analytics galore

**Step Five: Build your campaign team**

You may think you're going to pull off a project on your own, and you may indeed be able to do that, but I believe that a successful campaign takes a team of people. You're going to be very, very busy during and after your campaign, and if you're going it alone, you may find yourself considerably overwhelmed. I'm used to collaborative projects, so for me it was easy to assemble a team of people I trusted to join my project, but you might think about the following as team members who may also serve other roles on your actual project, or maybe just friends who are going to volunteer to help you out, because you've helped them out in the past (right?!):

a. social media and press contact person
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b. graphic designer/product designer
c. feedback providers on campaign previews
d. website manager/updater
e. campaign co-ordinator /message responder during campaign

Now, if you are a hermit and don’t have friends, you can hire some virtual assistants to help out with some of these things. If that’s the case, I recommend you familiarize yourself with the world of virtual assistants and get some practice using them before your campaign begins. Managing people remotely takes some practice to get right, and it also means you have to be really organized yourself. Personally, I’ve used oDesk with some success, although if you’ve got cash to spare, you may be more comfortable with something like Zirtual that uses Americans who speak English natively.

What you offer to your team in return is up to you. Maybe they owe you a favour. Maybe you can pay them a little. Maybe you can promise a cut of revenues that come in from the campaign. But remember, the majority of campaigns are unsuccessful, so be fair to them and explain this fact before you go promising rainbows!

**Step Six: Begin planning your project’s campaign**

It’s easy to leave things to the last minute. I’m a firm believer in starting early and revising often. It’s led me to much success in my life, and it works for other successful people I know. If you can start thinking about and planning your campaign now, you’ll have the time to pull it off. Start too late, and your media campaign will fail because your timing will be off.

Things you want to start thinking about at this stage include:

1. What kinds of things are you thinking of offering in return for backers supporting you?
2. What exactly do you want to do with your project?
3. How much time will your project take to complete?
4. What kind of compelling story can you tell to hook people in?
5. How much money do you think you need?
6. How much money can you afford to spend on your campaign?
7. How long will your campaign run?
8. What is the best time of year to run your campaign? (I’ve read that December is actually the most successful month, and I thought I’d be unsuccessful running one beginning in mid-August during peak vacation time, but it didn’t seem to impact me too much). If, however, your project relates to the World Series, then it’s probably best to co-ordinate the timing with the event.
9. Can you take time off work, or are you planning to hire someone to help you run the campaign? Can you afford to hire someone? How will you manage what is essentially a full-time job during the campaign if you can’t take time
off and can’t afford to hire someone? Will your spouse or family understand that you need to essentially work a second job for the duration of the campaign and will they support you?

10. Will my project be accepted by Kickstarter? Read Kickstarter’s Rules as well as their Prohibited Items. Make sure that your project fits into Kickstarter’s remit: “Projects must create something to share with others.”, “Projects must be honest and clearly presented.” And “Projects can’t fundraise for charity, offer financial incentives, or involve prohibited items.” See details here: https://www.kickstarter.com/rules . If you follow the steps outlined in this book, you should soon have a good grasp of what Kickstarter projects are successful and what is allowed.

Now, you’re going to revise these later as we go, but put your initial thoughts down on paper and think through how this will work out with your life: Can you get two weeks vacation in September but not in October? Then plan for September. Do you want to use your vacation time to do this? Can you really finish the project in three months, or is it more realistic to say it will take six months? And so on—thinking through the logistics early is going to help you to plan the campaign in more detail later, since you’ll have thought through much of the difficult parts! Perhaps the most important element here is the timing. As an early indicator, estimate how long things will take, and how much things will cost, then double it. We’ll do a more accurate estimate later.

Checklist: 6 Months Out

Check Kickstarter and ensure that I and my project idea are within their rules and regulations
Sign up for Kickstarter and create a profile page
Begin backing some Kickstarter projects
Find a good graphic designer and have them do a logo and some graphics
Sign up for a Twitter account, build a profile and begin gathering relevant content to share, and begin Tweeting!
Sign up for a Facebook page and build a profile, begin gathering “likes”.
Work on other ways to build a reputation online.
Link Twitter and Facebook pages inside Twitter
Build a website with a dedicated domain name
Get a PayPal account and donate button.
Make a list of people I know who can help me out and build a team
Write down answers to the ten questions proposed in Step Six
Phase 2: Three Months Out

Okay, you’ve spent at least the last three months building up your profile online, and you’re getting a good group of people engaging with you. Now it’s time to get more serious about the campaign itself. About three months out is a good time to take the following steps: again, I’ll go into more detail below:

1. Get a draft Kickstarter project page started
2. Plan all your rewards
3. Plan your campaign video

A Note on Getting Good Feedback

Your successful project is going to depend on you getting good feedback from your friends, family and followers. No matter how good you think you are, you will be better after getting and listening to good feedback. It can be hard to take criticism, but it’s a very important skill to have to be able to stand back and ask yourself, “Is this person being vindictive or are they telling me something that I should listen to?” It’s easy for us to get “feedback” from our friends, who will look at what we did and say, “That’s wonderful!” even if they secretly think it’s really ugly. The truth is, many of them would rather see your campaign fail later than hurt your feelings up front. The same thing goes for family. These people are going to be around long after the campaign is gone, so it’s in their interest to tell you what they think you want to know.

You need to find people who can give you objective feedback and ask deep questions, and you need to know how to ask for feedback.

Finding the right people to give you feedback:

You’ve been working hard now on building up a following, and hopefully there are enough people following you on Facebook or Twitter who are not friends or family, but who are regularly engaging with you, and are interested enough in your work to follow your preview link and give you feedback. You can always incentivize this part of your journey by offering something in return for their time if you’re not getting the advice you need. You may get some people who are just really negative or who “troll” you with garbage feedback, but pay attention to what even those people say, because there could be a nugget of truth hidden in all the negativity.

Asking the right questions:

I like to try to teach my grad students how to ask for feedback. Too often, I’m handed some student (or even my colleague’s) work with a vague request for
“feedback”. And if you’ve ever asked for “feedback” and gotten a response similar to “Um, it’s good”, then you’ve fallen into a very common trap. I usually respond with “what type of feedback are you looking for?” With my student’s work it’s usually an essay, so I have to be specific: “are you looking to see whether the structure works, whether your thesis is strong, whether the evidence supports your thesis, whether the writing is smooth and grammatically correct?” Knowing what they hope to get out of the “feedback” is something I need in order to give effective feedback. Reading a paper for structural errors is very different than reading for spelling mistakes.

You need to determine what type of feedback you are seeking and ask specific questions to answer what you’re trying to get feedback on. For instance, let’s say I want feedback on whether my rewards, so I need advice on whether the items are appealing and the price is right, so ask specific questions that people can answer relating to those two things:

“Hey folks, I’m looking for feedback on my Kickstarter campaign rewards: Can you check it out and tell me if you like what is on offer and if the prices are fair? Would you buy these things? Which ones do you like and which don’t you like and why? One of you will win the t-shirt free just for giving me feedback!”

Now you’re getting feedback you can use and implement.

Step One: Get a draft Kickstarter project page started

Kickstarter is fantastic in offering you the ability to start your project as early as you like and not publishing until you’re ready. Three months out is a great time to get started, because you’d be surprised how many tweaks you’ll want to make based on the feedback that you get, or something you thought of later, and these take time.

Before you begin, though, one important thing to think about is which category you’re going to put your project in. It may be very obvious—if you’re making clothes, you probably want it under fashion—but what if you’re making smart clothes that are wired to display your latest Tweet across your back? Is your main audience going to find you in Fashion, or Technology? Where is the line between art and crafts, or design and art, or design and technology? This is one reason why you want to spend some time on Kickstarter backing projects, discovering projects, seeing who else backs projects, and trying to back projects from a bunch of different categories to get a feel for those categories.

You can only pick one category, so pick the one that best describes what you are creating and who your audience is. If you’ve done market research on your widget, you should have an idea already, but if you haven’t, take a sample of friends and ask them where they think they would find your project, given the list of categories supplied by Kickstarter: Art, Comics, Crafts, Dance, Design, Fashion, Film & Video, Food, Games, Journalism, Music, Photography, Publishing, Technology, Theater.
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Figure 2.1 Kickstarter project categories. Hovering over these buttons will tell you how many current projects there are in each category. Clicking the button will provide you with details about the overall projects and amount pledged.

If you still can’t decide, click on the buttons on the home page to get a description of categories and how much has been pledged to each category. At the time of writing, $45 million has been pledged to art projects, but $225 million to design projects, so if my project sits in the middle, I’m probably better off in the “Design” category!

Figure 2.2 The detail page for the Design category
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Figure 2.3 Category Subcategories

Take a look at successful projects in the categories your project might fit in, and make sure it’s where you belong. Don’t pick a category just because it has lots of money pledged to it: If I know my product will appeal to fashionistas rather than technology geeks, then I’m not doing myself any favours by putting it in the Technology category, which may not be looked at by fashion folk! There are also subcategories that you can use to narrow down your area of focus. These can help propel you to the front page of your category if you’re in a small niche category, but may obscure what you are if you pick the wrong one.

Once you’ve picked your category, you’ll need to think of a title. Titles are important. They may be the only thing mentioned in a blog entry or press coverage, so be sure to get the title right! Your title should make clear what your project is, but not say “campaign”. You’re already on Kickstarter, no need to tell people twice.

“Potato Famine Quilt” tells people what I’m making and hopefully has a bit of a hook that’s going to interest people into finding out more about it. “Potato Famine Quilt: A book about the potato famine” would be confusing, but provides more information on exactly what it’s about. On the other hand, “my quilt project” or “Jane Doe’s Quilt
Design” doesn’t help the viewer much, and doesn’t say much about what I’m all about. Be descriptive. Try some out on your friends. Ask your Twitter followers what their favourite title is—this is a great way to get some engagement early on and give your followers something to connect with you on! Your title becomes your URL later, so try to pick a good name that makes sense and spell it correctly.

![Figure 2.4 Starting out my mock project](image)

You can put in a temporary title and save it and edit it later. In fact, you can edit the title even after you’ve launched your campaign. I changed my title part way through from “Beep: A documentary history of game sound” to “Beep: A documentary history of game sound and music” so anyone searching by the keyword “music” would be able to find it. A subtle difference, but that extra word may have made a big difference to people who assumed “sound” only meant “sound effects” and not music. To me, the word “sound” incorporates everything auditory, but I soon discovered that not everyone feels that way!

**Funding Duration**

Kickstarter has done its own analytics, and found that 30 days is the best amount of time for a campaign. If you’ve done the preparation work recommended in this book, then 30 days will be enough. I didn’t think I could do it, and with launching in mid-August, prime North American summer holiday period, I thought I would have a soft launch in August and need the whole month of September. I was wrong. 30 days would have been enough!

Longer durations can actually have a negative effect—some people will think they’ve got plenty of time and plan to come back but then forget about it (despite the “remind me” button available to them). The time pressure aspect of a campaign
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is an important component—people need to feel that urge to do it now, instead of waiting. Plus, if you’re doing your campaign right, you’re going to be exhausted, and being exhausted for thirty days is better than being exhausted for sixty days! Hopefully you’re taking some time off work—at least in the first and last week of the campaign—so running yourself ragged for two months just isn’t going to be useful to you. Thirty days really is enough.

You can leave the calendar blank for now, since you can figure out the exact dates later, but if you want to set yourself a goal, go ahead and set it up now. I’ve read conflicting advice about what day of the week to launch on. I launched on a Friday night, which was probably the worst possible time. I’d recommend you launch on a weekday morning, your time zone, since you want your first day (calculated at end of day, not 24 hours) to be strong. More on this later. Note that you can change the date, time and length of campaign right up until your launch but not after your launch. If you say 30 days and you get to day 10 and realize it’s not going to happen, you can’t go back and add another month.

An important consideration for picking dates is whether or not you can get time off work for your campaign. If you can’t, you want to start and end on the weekend, so you can devote those weekends to your campaign.

**Funding Goal**

Setting a goal was probably the most agonizing part of my planning. Being strategic here is critical. If you set a goal too high, you may scare off people who don’t think you have a snowball’s chance in hell of succeeding, and you may even get really close but not hit your goal, meaning you get nothing at all. Let’s say you ask for $50,000. You work really, really, hard for the six months leading up to your campaign and the month of your campaign, but end up with $40,000. Maybe $40,000 would have been enough and you could have kicked in the extra $10,000 yourself if it came down to it, but now you’ve blown it (you can’t back yourself on Kickstarter!) and all that work was a waste.

On the other hand, if you ask for too little, you run the risk of hitting the goal too early and scaring off altruists who wanted to see your project succeed. They’ve now been informed that you hit your goal, so you’re “good to go” in their minds. I’m less concerned about this happening, because so many projects succeed well beyond their initial goal as to make this less of a concern than not hitting your goal.

We’ll do some calculations later, and you can change this up to but not after your launch, but for now, take the absolute minimum that you need to pull off your project, add 10% contingency, then another10% for Kickstarter fees (they take 5% plus 3-5% for processing), guesstimate your rewards and shipping fulfillment and put that in as your initial goal.
One thing to consider is if a friend or family can kick in the final few thousand if you're not going to hit your goal. You can take it as a loan from them and pay the back later, of course, but it's useful to think this through now, because you could theoretically try for a larger goal if you know that you have a few thousand dollars lee-way through being able to cover the last bit from friends and family if you don’t hit your goal. Personally, I don't like to borrow money. Apparently, I'm more of a gambler, so I figured I'd roll the dice and see what happens rather than promise to pay people back later.

**Location**

Your project location really only matters for the people who are looking for projects in their own location. For this reason, pick a large city near you. For me, I'm just outside Toronto, so I put Toronto as my hometown here, even though I technically live about an hour’s drive away (three hours during traffic!). When I do a search for projects on Kickstarter’s site, I can find other projects right on my homepage that are in my hometown, Waterloo, which was set on my profile page. Others will have found my Kickstarter project page listed as Toronto, not Waterloo, though. So where I personally am is different than where I set the project location to be.

**Short Blurb**

How do you sum up your project in just one or two sentences? This is a very critical part of your project, since this description is what will show up in your project panel on the discover pages, and widget to embed (more later). Read a bunch of these on successful project pages and see what appeals to you. For many people, this will be the one thing that draws them to click onto your page. How are people with *successful* similar projects pitching their ideas? Here is an example of a few I like right now:

I Am What's Underneath - True Style Is Self Acceptance by Elisa Goodkind & Lily Mandelbaum “A feature-length documentary that strips us down to open us up, empowering people worldwide to accept and express their true selves."

**Notes:** describes what it is in case you don’t see it in the category section (it’s a documentary film), describes what the film is about, and has an emotional appeal.

Thimbleweed Park: A New Classic Point & Click Adventure! by Ron Gilbert & Gary Winnick “It’s like opening a dusty old desk drawer and finding an undiscovered LucasArts adventure game you’ve never played before.”

**Notes:** For me, the mention of LucasArts games is the clincher! Anyone who played those games knows that one word sums up what type of game you’re getting here. Mentioning a dusty old desk drawer helps to give us a visual, and appeals to nostalgia. We know it’s a game, of an older style adventure genre appealing to people like me.
PHENOL Patchable Analog Synthesizer by Kilpatrick Audio “An affordable patchable analog synthesizer. Create music and sound like never before with this unique instrument.”

Notes: says what it is (unique instrument), what you can do with it (create music and sound) and draws you in with keyword “affordable”. I’d like to see an emotional appeal here, too, but you’re limited in space, so when all else fails, give a summary of what it is and what you can do with it.

For Love of the Land Painting Project by Janet Moore “Help me buy art supplies and time in my studio to make large landscape paintings of areas close to my home and close to my heart.”

Notes: What I like about this particular description is she’s not trying to dress it up. It appeals to the emotional side because of the mention of home and heart.

Figure 2.5. The short blurb: See how on the right your widget will look to people scanning projects: Your short blurb is all they get, so make it count!

Project Image

Here is where a great photographer or designer will really come in handy. Your picture should sell your project. People should look at it and “ooh” and “aah”. It should be eye catching and exciting. What you choose here can make or break your
project, so think carefully: What represents your project? Is it a widget, someone’s agonized face screaming? A cute graphic? What is going to rise above the noise of all the others out there? Try some out on your friends and Twitter followers, and see what they think! (My image in this graphic is from this site: http://www.thejournal.ie/cause-famine-918495-May2013/)

Figure 2.6. Selecting a compelling picture to attract your audience. Check how it looks at different sizes.

For my own Kickstarter, I stuck with a simple logo, but with an unusual colour (orange) to stand out from all the other films that had one or more people in a photograph.

Note the 4:3 aspect ratio of the image, because this is also used for your project page header. 4:3 means that the length is 4x to the height 3x. So an image would be some multiplication in pixels of 4:3, like 400px wide to 300px high (but much larger than this!

Hit Save, and Preview what you’ve got so far. Note that there is a preview link that you can send to your friends and followers: They can see, and comment on the preview, without you having to launch it first. Note, too, your bio is on there—how many projects you’ve backed before is visible for all to see. We’ll come back to the details next month, but for now, let’s get your rewards mapped out.
Step Two: Planning Your Kickstarter Rewards

How will you thank the people who support you?
Offer an experience, a copy of the thing, or a thank you in the credits. Get creative!

I generally like to think of Kickstarter backers as filling four separate roles: altruists, co-creators, collectors and shoppers.
The Secrets to a Successful Kickstarter Campaign

_Altruists_ support projects because they want to help the project out. They may not want any rewards at all, just to donate money to you to see you reach your goals. They may select “no reward” or may select a tier below what they are paying for, or may just throw in a bit extra. These people aren’t in it for the rewards: To them, support is its own reward. They are golden, and showing them appreciation will go a long way.

_Shoppers_ tend to want to support you for the purpose of getting a specific reward. They like what you’re offering and they want it, so they will pay you for it. These shoppers may want early access (if you’re using Kickstarter to make a product, for instance), they may want something exclusive (signed by you, a special colour only for Kickstarter backers, etc.) or they may just not want to wait the year or more before your widget shows up in stores.

_Co-Creators_ want to be a part of the creative process: they want to appear in your movie, or have their avatar in your video game. These people will pony up big dollars to play a role in your project, so plan something for them!

_COLLECTORS_ are there looking at your stuff because they collect something similar, or they are interested in exclusive items that cannot be purchased in stores. If you have 3 colours of an exclusive widget only available to Kickstarter, they may buy all three, and leave them boxed up for the future. The key here is exclusivity.

Altruists, shoppers, collectors and co-creators are not necessarily exclusive of one another. I’ve backed some projects just wanting to help out: I’ve backed others because I wanted it as a Christmas gift for a friend, or wanted something only available through Kickstarter. I’ve backed a few because I thought it would be fun to be a part of the project (I got to do some zombie voice work for a zombie flick, for instance). I’ve also backed a project because I admired the artist’s work and wanted a signed piece for my art collection.

When it comes to rewards, backers usually choose from a series of options with different tiers and prices. Beware! Too many tiers just confuse people and they will leave without pledging anything. I made this mistake after I discovered it wasn’t possible to edit tiers after launching the site, and agreed to bring some new tiers in later. Things got messy really quickly and it confused people. Pick just a few things to offer people, and keep tiers simple: I’d recommend maybe 4 or 5 tiers at costs below $100 and two or three higher tiers for the random person that will surprise you. If you are selling a widget, then think about just a price for one widget, for two widgets, for the limited edition widget, and then offer a deal on a multi-pack of three widgets. Don’t get more complicated than that.

Your first goal, then, is to think about your project and think about how you can appeal to as many people as possible. What can you offer to people who want something exclusive? What can you offer to people who want a nice product? What can you offer to altruists that they’ll appreciate?
The Secrets to a Successful Kickstarter Campaign

Be sure to read the rules on what you can offer to your backers: you can’t go buy up a bunch of widgets from another store and sell them, for instance. They have to be created as a part of your project. Kickstarter has a whole list of items that are not usable as backer rewards.

Rewards take time and money to fulfill. Lots of people look at your Kickstarter page and think, “wow, you made $40,000!!!” But the reality is, it may be that you made $20,000 and the rest has to go to fulfilling what you promised people. There are several key points to consider:

1. Appeal to the majority, and appeal to altruists and shoppers.
2. Minimize your time and money fulfilling rewards
3. Minimize physical objects to ship
4. Think through the cost of fulfillment as a whole, and as individual items.

Appealing to the Many

Think about what you can offer to appeal to the different types of people that use Kickstarter. You want something for everyone, and you want to appeal to as wide an audience as possible. Alienating a potential audience by using, for instance, sexist imagery, isn't going to help you.

Appealing to the altruists

Altruists are people that care and share. An important way that you can appeal to not just altruists but also shoppers is to use ethical fulfillment. Don’t source the cheapest t-shirts. Source the eco-friendly ink, sweatshop free, organic cotton t-shirt and let people know that’s what is on offer. They’ll likely be willing to pay a few dollars more without hesitation, and everyone can have the good-feelies making a purchase, you get the good-feelies for doing the right thing, and it’s a positive experience all round. There are environmentally friendly products available everywhere now, and getting ethically sound options is the best way to show the community that you are serious about making positive changes in the world.

Appealing to the co-creators

Can co-creators be involved in some way? Can they create something that goes into your project? Can they be involved in terms of visiting your set or studio? Having lunch with you, or a Skype one-on-one career advice session? Co-creators want to feel like they’re a part of your project and, in my experience, are the biggest backers and will go the farthest to spread the word to their friends and family, so think long and hard about what you can do to get these people involved!

Appealing to shoppers

Will shoppers want a mug (costly and awkward to ship, and may break in transit) or a t-shirt? I think t-shirts are probably the best reward: They’re relatively
inexpensive to make in short runs, but usually sell for at least twice the cost, so you can make some money off them. They are free advertising for your project, since people are walking around with your logo/brand/etc. And people love to show that they supported a project—especially if you’re really successful and they can pull it out to wear it at your premiere, or product launch, or whatever. They also don’t break in shipping, and are relatively cheap and easy to pack and ship (can be stuffed into large envelopes and shipped small packet, for instance). Compare that to posters that can get crushed, are awkward to ship (requiring tubes), can get bent or damaged in shipping, and don’t really help you get word out farther about your project. But—if you can offer a limited edition, signed poster, then you’ve upped the ante and can charge a little more, potentially making it worth your while. Everyone knows, shoppers love a bargain, so if you’re creating a widget, you can offer a discount off what the planned retail price will be.

Appealing to collectors

Collectors are a lot like shoppers—they want “stuff”. But they want the stuff that nobody else is going to have, and they’re willing to pay a bit more for that. An autographed widget, an exclusive colour, a Kickstarter-only version of the widget, a numbered, limited edition version, and more are your collector rewards. You want to make these exclusive—and you have that option in the Kickstarter rewards screen to set how many are available. Set them low enough to entice collectors, but high enough to get lots of collectors involved! Depending on what you’re offering, 50 may be a good number. So you could have an unlimited amount of your potato salad quilt available, but you could have a special collector version that has a unique autographed piece right in the middle that is only available to 50 people.

Minimize your time and cost fulfilling rewards

Firstly, think about what you can offer that doesn’t cost you anything in manufacturing and shipping time or money. These are great rewards because they don’t cost you anything but a little time. Some examples are;

1. Tweet their name with a thanks: I sent out over 1000 Tweets this way. And many of those people then followed me.
2. Create a backers page on your website with their name
3. Provide a digital download of your project, of a copy of diagrams, schematics, desktop screensaver, planning pages, or whatever you can find relating to your project to let them download
4. Provide exclusive access to backer section of your website
5. Send a digital thank-you card, email, drawing, animation, etc.

These types of rewards are great for lower tiers of backer rewards, like $5 or so, because the altruist that wants to help can come and give you money and that money is pure profit to you, apart from a little time spent fulfilling the rewards.
Shipping takes a lot of time, and if you're shipping 1000 items to people who gave you $5, you're not making money, particularly if you have to fill out a customs form for every single item! Make sure you calculate the cost of your time in shipping items. Take something similar to the object on offer to the post office and double-check what shipping costs will be with all packaging. Underestimating shipping can be fatal! Imagine if I have a sticker of my project that I promise people for just $2 + $2 shipping. Well, then I have to figure in printing labels, buying envelopes, buying stamps, stuffing envelopes, organizing the list of people to ship to and going to the post office to ship them—I’m going to go to the post office and discover stamps went up and it’s now $2.50 to ship it. I am going to spend about 15 minutes per person, and I’m going to make about 20 cents for that 15 minutes. Not worth it!

Allow some room in your costs, but also don’t gouge your customers on price! I backed a Kickstarter project and then looked again when I got the notification saying how much the total cost was—They were charging $100 for shipping from the USA to me, to ship something that costs maybe $25 to ship. I would have accepted $40 or maybe even $50 shipping costs, but $100 was just taking the piss. Likewise, their price for Canadian shipping was the same as all other international countries, and I happen to know that shipping to Canada costs a lot less than overseas. I cancelled my pledge, and I’m pretty sure their Kickstarter will fail because of their shipping costs. I’d rather they charged more for the original item and kept shipping fair than tried to surprise me come shipping.

Remember also, physical rewards take up physical space. Not a problem for me with my basement, but if you live in an apartment, consider how much room you can devote to the potentially months of storage of stuff you need to ship. I had one of the projects I’d backed send out a message saying that the book rewards would be shipped in three separate rounds, because he could only order a few boxes of them at a time to fit into his small apartment!

There are specialty fulfillment organizations now that will help you to fulfill your orders, and depending on what your widget is, you may find you can ship directly from a print-on-demand warehouse or fulfillment house, but ultimately, these all cost money too, and you need to factor that into your costs if you’re going to do that. If you’ve decided you can’t stand to spend a week packing up your widgets, then get some quotes for different numbers of items now from these places so that you can add that to your costs.

**Think through the cost of fulfillment as a whole, and as individual items.**

I decided that posters would be a great option—and offered unique, silkscreened posters, which are much nicer than digital prints, but I only sold about 20 of them. The cost of setting up the screens and printing just 20 posters means that the
posters cost a lot more money than what I made on them. If I'd sold 300 posters, the cost would have been minimal and I could have made a good profit, but I am still obligated to fill the order despite losing a lot of money on that item. This is an important lesson: Think through bulk costs and price it out if you only get a handful of backers and work out if it's worth it. I could, I suppose, contact those backers and offer them something else, but I feel obligated to give them what they paid for, no matter what it ends up costing me. I've ended up printing 50 of the posters, since it only ended up costing me about another $100 for the extra 30 of each poster, and I'm hoping to sell the others at some point in the future and make some of the costs back, or use them as special thank-you gifts for my team and friends that helped me out.

I could have saved myself this problem by only offering one or two rewards, the poster being one of them. By giving too much choice, I spread the demand too thinly. Alternately, I could have priced them at the rate they would actually cost for a single poster, but likely this would have been far too expensive for anyone to actually want! So the solution here is to offer fewer items, but also offer things that can be made in smaller numbers for a reasonable price.

**Getting Quotes from Vendors**

As mentioned above, find out how much everything costs, not just for one, but for multiple amounts of items. How much will it cost per t-shirt to fulfill the order of 200 t-shirts, and how much will it cost per t-shirt if you have 5000 t-shirts? You're going to need your vendor to provide you with several quotes. Don't forget to add shipping from the vendor to you. If you find a local vendor that can make your t-shirts for $7 each and you can drive to pick them up, that may be cheaper than a vendor that can make your t-shirts for $6 each but is across the continent and will charge $300 for shipping.

If you find a vendor that you like, ask them for a discount in exchange for a mention in your campaign! You could always say “t-shirts will be made locally by XYZ t-shirts” right in your reward section, in exchange for a nice discount. Remember what I said above about altruists—you can go eco-friendly and let people know--“our t-shirts are certified sweatshop free”, “our postcards are printed on 100% recycled paper with eco-friendly plant-based inks”, and so on. Your backers will appreciate that these things cost a little more but are worth it!

Don't cheap out on the items. You can find cheaper, I am sure, but it will feel cheap and look cheap and disappoint your backers in the end. Get the right product and get it done well the first time. My rule of thumb for my backers is the same as my rule of thumb for my business: underpromise and overdeliver. I've got some extra little goodies to throw in for my backers (stickers, postcards) just to give them that extra smile when they open the packet. If you want to do the same, factor these cost in as well!
Estimating Delivery Dates

Having been a Kickstarter member for seven years now, I can speak from experience when I say that most people get their shipping delivery date estimate wrong. Sometimes by a month or two, sometimes by more than a year. Estimating a delivery date isn't really all that difficult. The key here is figuring out when you are going to be finished your creation, and moving forward from there, if the item is actually some object directly related to what you're building. If you're making a film, you can't ship the film until it's been completed. If you're making a one-off sculpture, though, and selling t-shirts or tote bags to commemorate the event, then you can make those as soon as you get your money from Kickstarter and organize yourself.

Here's a few things to know when it comes to estimating a delivery:

• Everything takes longer than you think it will. This is a good rule of thumb for life, generally, and something I am constantly trying to drill into my students’ minds!

• Remember, if you're ordering something (t-shirts, DVDs, custom coins) you are at the mercy of your supplier. Find out now how long it will take them to deliver, and then double that time so you’re not promising something you can't deliver on. Ask your supplier if they have a busy period and plan around it.

• After you plan on actually having the items at your home ready to go, don't underestimate how much time it will take you to get the items packed up to ship. You may think “well, I’m just making a t-shirt, so I can get all of them shipped in 2 weeks” but if you get 3000 orders, and you're packing them and labeling by hand, then it's going to take you more than 2 weeks to get that done. Take each of your items and pack up and ship one to yourself (you can stop when you get the quote at the post office): How much time did it take to wrap, to fill out a customs form, to fill out the address labels, etc.)

• Overestimate the number of people who will purchase your items, and multiply shipping time by that number.

• You can change the shipping date up to the time of your campaign launch, and you can let your backers know if you’re late later, but being late is unprofessional and reflects on you and your ability to deliver if you want to come back to those backers next time you want to make something. A few months is forgivable, but I've seen reputations trashed after people were years late.

• Add the in-transit shipping time to your estimate. If you are planning on shipping items from your trip to Nepal and send them surface mail, they could take 2 months to arrive, so add that in-transit time into your date. Remember, this is the delivery date, not the shipping date you’re giving them.
Restricting Location

Kickstarter’s backer rewards section allows you to restrict where you are willing to ship to. Use this with caution, but also understand where it may be useful. For example, someone contacted me during their campaign to ask if I’d take a look at their campaign and comment on how they could improve it. I did, and realized that they’d asked me, based in Canada, to evaluate why their product, only available to those in the USA, wasn’t attracting enough pledges. I pointed out that even if I wanted to support them I couldn’t, because they’d restricted their pledges to Americans! There was no need for that restriction, other than that they were probably too lazy to find out what it would cost to ship farther than the 50 States. I would estimate that about half of my backers came from the USA, and the rest were from all over the world. If I’d set a restriction, not only would those people be disappointed that I wasn’t willing to include them in my project, but I’d lose out on all those backers.

Now, there may be a good reason why you need to restrict your shipping: For instance, if I had a farm-based food product (like a potato) and there are some countries where food-based mail are restricted, then I might not be able to ship it across the border. Find this out now, while you still have time. Other restrictions may include weapons and replica weapons or munitions (which Kickstarter doesn’t allow), herbal remedies, tobacco or alcohol, drug paraphernalia (sorry, your fancy handmade bongs may be restricted!), liquids, powders and plants. Be sure to check
now with the post office and/or your customs office if you have any concerns about what you’re planning to ship.

In this section you can also set how much shipping will cost to each individual place. So you can set $5 for shipping within your own country (or no added shipping), and add additional shipping charges to specific regions.

Offer an experience, a copy of the thing, or a thank you in the credits. Get creative!

Figure 2.10 Estimating Shipping costs per region

How much shipping to charge? Make sure you take a similar item down to the post office or get it weighed at home and look up charges for the size, shape and weight of your item to various regions. Then add a dollar or two, depending on what the item is, because shipping material costs money (wrap, boxes, bubblewrap, labels), and the price could go up before you are finished and ready to ship. You may end up paying someone (hello, students!) to help you out, so factor the time-cost and potential cost of all that pizza you’re going to give them.

Limiting Quantity
A great feature of Kickstarter is the ability to limit the quantity. This has several benefits:

- It creates a sense of urgency among your backers that if they don’t back soon, the quantity may run out. This is particularly important to build momentum in the early days of your campaign so many people offer an ‘Early backer’
reward where the item is cheaper or a bonus is thrown in for the first 50 people or so. You don’t want everyone waiting until the end of your campaign to pledge, you need to build momentum, so getting early pledges in is a great help.

- It allows you to create a sense of exclusivity. If I’m making a potato poster to sell with my potato quilt, I may want to create only 50 of each poster design, hand number and sign each one. As a backer, I know I’m getting something that is truly a “limited edition”.

Now, you can change the quantity of items during the campaign. So if you sell out of 50 on your first day, you can bump that up to 100. You may upset some of the people who thought you would only have 50, so depending on what it is, you may want to consider not changing that number. You can also change that number to less. Let’s say I realize part way through my campaign that I’m going to hit my goal, and the amount of work to make a particular rare potato doll isn’t really going to be worth my time, and I’ve sold 5 of them. I can change the number from 50 to 5 and it will show the item sold out.

**Chance to wins and other contests**

We had a thought part way through our campaign to give a special rare limited coloured vinyl of our soundtrack to a handful of our backers. Kickstarter however does not allow any form of raffle or “one lucky winner” type offers as part of your campaign, so you can’t say that one of your backers will have a chance to win a special trip to Prince Edward Island’s potato festival. No raffles or lotteries allowed. Of course, nothing stops you from running something like this from your Twitter account, but it’s dishonest and if Kickstarter found out, they might be upset, so just find some other way to entice people.

**You cannot change your reward details after you launch**

This point is really important to understand the implications of now, before you launch. You can’t change the price or description after you launch. So if you launch with a reward of a “t-shirt” and later want to add that it’s an “eco-friendly organic cotton sweatshop free t-shirt”, you’re too late. You can add that in your general Kickstarter page details, but not in the rewards section, which is where people will look for it first. This inability to change the rewards later is why you want to get the rewards organized now: You want to get people to preview your rewards and give you feedback on pricing, quality, etc. and ask questions about the item that you can answer in those rewards sections, and so on in advance of your launch.

**Planning for unfortunate events**

As a Canadian, I set my Kickstarter rewards at Canadian dollar prices. At the time I launched the campaign, the Canadian dollar sat at about 93 cents to the US dollar. Two months after the campaign, it fell down to 86 cents. A year later, when it came to shipping, it was down to 75 cents. Most of my costs were in US dollars, so I took a huge hit on my total budget, lost a lot of money on a lot of items. I shipped things out
knowing that every single one I was shipping I was actually losing money on. Think about in which currency you are spending most of your money. Plan for contingencies, because 5% off the top can mean you’re now on the hook for some of the costs you hadn’t planned on. Other things can impact your costs—if you’ve promised organic cotton t-shirts and cotton plants take a beating this year, your costs could suddenly increase. So add at least a 10% contingency in your budget to account for the unaccountables!

**Staged Tiers**
A great solution that I flubbed up is to do staged tiers:
- Tier one you get a thank you
- Tier two you get a thank you plus a widget
- Tier three you get a thank you, widget and t-shirt.
- And so on.

The reason I say I flubbed this is because I had too many tiers and by the time people got to the end of the list they’d forgotten what they were going to get. I ran out of text to describe all the items. I had added too many bonus levels after the campaign launch because sponsors came on and wanted to offer things for me to give away, but not enough to offer everyone, and so the tiers became a real mess. I can’t stress enough, it will be easier for you to fulfill later and easier for your backers if you keep it really simple and minimize what you offer to people. I think the magic number is four or five, with one “blue sky” tier (a significant cost tier for people who want to give you lots of money).

**Step Three: Planning Your Campaign Video**

Nearly all Kickstarter projects have a campaign video. People don’t like to read long blocks of text, and so they’d prefer to watch a couple minutes of video to see who you are and what you’re all about.

Your campaign video may be the most time-consuming element of your campaign preparation. Starting early is really important, particularly because you’ll need to book your videographer and edit the content yourself (or hire someone to do that for you), so it’s very important to get start now while you’ve got time to go through several iterations and get it right.

The first thing to think about is what your campaign video is going to say and how you’re going to script it. You want your video to show who you are, and tell a story about your project. You don’t want it to come across as a sales pitch: You want to show your enthusiasm and tell why your project should be made.
The campaign video doesn’t have to be slick, but it does have to tell your story in a compelling manner. You’ve joined Kickstarter and have probably already watched a bunch of campaign videos, but spend some more time watching and analyzing many campaign videos and see what works and what doesn’t for you. Which ones made you want to pledge and why?

The key to your campaign video is you. People want to see who you are, and what you’re about. Coming across as fake is probably the worst thing you can do, so you have to walk a careful balance between being well-scripted and yet appearing spontaneous and honest.

Length

The general rule of thumb for Kickstarter videos is that they should be about two minutes long. You can change your video during your campaign, and initially I had one that ran longer—about three minutes—because I had some great footage to show. But after the first few days of the campaign I check the stats (more about this later) and found that less than half of people were watching the video to the end. I cut the video in half, down to about 90 seconds, and put it up again, and the number of finished video watches went up. I got down to the core of what the video was about, and left it at that, and it worked.

Script

Write a script for your video: What are you going to say? Of course, you want to tell people who you are: your name, what you do. Tell them why you’re on Kickstarter and what you hope to build. Then ask for their help. It sounds so simple, and yet, it took me weeks of drafting to get just a few sentences right. Read your script out loud and speak it to the mirror. And then speak it to other people and ask for feedback. Revise and cut it down. Then repeat. Then throw it away and try to wing it, because it will sound too scripted!

Filming

You’ll need a videographer to film you. You can expect to pay about $500 and up for a half day with a good videographer. You may think your two-minute video can be shot in under half an hour, but be warned: it takes a lot longer to get the video shot than you think. Firstly, it will take the videographer at least 30 minutes to set up lights and frame you correctly. Then, you will panic being on camera and take 300 takes to get the right take (at least, that’s what happened to me). It took me about 4 hours to get the two minutes of takes I needed. Make sure your videographer understands audio and has a good audio kit—they may even have an audio person helping them. There’s nothing that shows amateurism like bad sound in the video.

Think about filming location: I’m a big fan of natural light and wanted to film outside, but I was making a documentary about video games, and ended up picking
the take of me inside a very dark arcade, so if you have the budget, do the takes in a few different places. Remember that you may need permission to film in your locations, so check that out now if you plan to film somewhere in public. For my shot in an arcade, we had to scout the location first, and get permission from the venue (House of Targ in Ottawa) to shoot there. They were kind enough to open the arcade on a Sunday morning when nobody was there so we could shoot without interrupting their customers. In exchange, we offered to mention them and link to their website on our Kickstarter page and tweet about them on Twitter. And there, I’ve just mentioned how great they are here, too!

Don’t forget to smile! Unless your subject matter for your project is deadly serious, it’s definitely important to smile in your video. It’s amazing how much difference a smile can make. Ask the videographer to let you watch one of the takes that he or she likes while on set, so you can judge for yourself how you’re doing and what you might want to change. You don’t want to have to hire them back a second time, so it’s important to get this right. They will have a monitor on their camera where you can play back some takes, and if you have time you can download the data from the camera to a laptop to watch it on a bigger screen.

There are also some practical aspects to appearing on camera: wear pastel, blue, brown, green or grey. Avoid white, red, orange, or black and white clothes. Wear solid colours, not stripes or checks or otherwise patterned clothing. Apply powder makeup (yes, even if you’re male) to take the shine off your face. Other makeup should be used sparingly. You want to come across as genuine, not hide your face and get all vamped up. Get the audio right—if you have a noisy location, tell your videographer to capture you on a lav microphone, and you may have to overdub it later. Rehearse it, do many takes, don’t mumble or fidget, don’t speak too quickly or too quietly. Smile.

**B-Roll**

“B-roll” is the term for all of the “filler” video material that goes into a film or television show. For your campaign video, it may be footage of a distant location you intend to travel to, shots of your rewards or prototype, or other such footage. It’s important too to get the camera b-roll while you’ve got the videographer hired. Are you going to show a video of your widget and what it does? Or are you going to have still images of your widget that will need photographs taken? Your videographer has the lights and cameras there, so you might as well get it done in one day!

You can use stock video footage to cover shots of locations that you are trying to get to—let’s say my project to make potato salad requires me to travel to Ireland to interview people about potatoes. I can’t do that until I’ve raised the money, but I can use stock footage of Ireland to show where I want to go. You can get decent stock footage of the kinds of length that you want to use for $50 or so from stock video.
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sites like Pond5 (http://www.pond5.com), videohive (http://www.videohive.net), and so on.

A Campaign Photo

Have your videographer snap a few photos of you for your campaign off while the cameras and lights are all set up. They may specialize in videography, but chances are they’ve got a camera that can take stills, and getting a professional photo of you will help you immensely if you don’t have any great pictures of you.

Editing your video

As discussed in the b-roll section above, in addition to the footage that you shot, you want to think about what else you might show in your video: Are you going to show still images of historical events, or pictures of rewards? Get these organized now, even though you have a few months to go. Like everything else, perfection is about tweaking and tweaking until launch day!

Watch your takes from your shoot and pick a few that you think are the best, and then ask a friend or family member to pick one. This is one feedback session where you’re not going to strangers, but to people who are close to you: They know you best, so they can pick one that they think shows best who you really are.

Since you have a few months until launch, you can do a few different edited versions of your video: Try a long version and a short version, just in case, like me, you need to switch over to the short version.

You can learn how to edit video quite quickly with a one or two-month subscription to Adobe Creative Cloud and Lynda.com. Alternatively, if you’re not that way inclined, hire someone to edit the video for you based on a script you’ll give them and tell them that you want two edits—a 2 minute(ish) and a 1-1.5 minute(ish) version.

You may need to overdub some of the audio for the section of video that you’re not on-screen for. Here are a few tips:

• Get a decent microphone and have someone show you how to position it. You want to be fairly close to your mic for this video, because you want it to feel fairly intimate with your viewer. The farther you are physically from your mic, the farther it feels that you are from your listener. But, get too close and you’ll pick up all the sibilance and plosives of your voice, so practice with several distances, and be off-centre of your microphone (it should be to the left or right of your mouth, not directly in front).

• Record somewhere quiet. If you have a loud house, grab a laptop and record it inside your car somewhere remote. The feel of the room is often captured in a recording, so don’t try recording in your bathroom, even if that is the quietest room in the house, because the reverberance makes it sound just

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like you recorded it in your bathroom. If that’s the only place that’s quiet, hang a heavy blanket over your shower, and put blankets on the floor, towel racks, and over the sink.

Figure 2.11 The Blue Yeti, a great USB-microphone at an affordable price.

**Getting Fancy: Graphics**

If you are going to go all-out and demand a fancy video, you can add some motion graphics—“lower thirds”, which are the subtitles on the screen that popup and animate saying who someone is when they’re being interviewed, title themes, “idents” (animated logos), and so on. You can use templates to cut costs and time down here, particularly if you intend to do the video editing yourself and don’t want to hire this part out. Depending on what you want to do, you can get a decent template for about $20 and up from websites like VideoHive (http://www.videohive.net) and edit the template yourself in less than a day. You can also create motion graphics from scratch in the Adobe suite software. Be mindful, though, sometimes videos that are too slick can put off your potential pledges: They want you to need the money, and if it looks like you spent all you’re asking for on your video, then they may question your need for the money. Keep it simple and clean, and don’t get too fancy unless your project really demands it.

**Music**

Once you’ve got a couple of edits of video, you’re likely going to want to add some background music. You can find music for your video by licensing a track from a stock music site, such as AudioJungle (http://www.audiojungle.com), AudioMicro (http://www.audiomicro.com) or Pond 5 (http://www.pond5.com). You can usually download a sample that has some overdub that you can try out in your video before choosing one and paying for it. Music is quite cheap, considering how much work goes into making the tracks, so you can get a really good track for $10-$20 or so. Try to choose music that makes sense for your project. If I’m making a project about potato salad and traveling to Ireland, then it might work to have some Celtic
music in the background. It certainly wouldn’t make sense to have some loud Techno. You may get some advice and help from friends here, if you’re not musically inclined. Fade the music out when you’re speaking in the video, so that people can focus on you.

A Point on Copyright
It’s important to know that you can’t use copyrighted material in your campaign video or indeed anywhere else on your page. Unless you’ve paid for the rights (like with stock footage, stock imagery or stock music that you’ve purchased), you cannot use anything created by somebody else. You can’t stick Mario on your page to help promote your game. You can’t use Michael Jackson’s “Thriller” to help sell your Zombie novel. If in doubt, leave it out. The last thing you want is a take-down notice part way through your campaign and you have to tell your backers you’ve cancelled the project because you’re getting sued.

Checklist: Three Months Out

Start working on project page, including getting feedback
Take and/or choose a compelling project image
Start collecting quotes on reward items
Start collecting shipping quotes
Get feedback on rewards and campaign page so far
Plan campaign video:
Hire a videographer
Write and practice script
Scout locations
Find b-roll clips to use
Plan out shoot, including b-roll and photography

Phase 3: Two Months Out

By now you’ve probably figured out that the reason that you want to start planning all of this out now, several months in advance of your launch, is that preparing these things takes time, and starting early will give you that time.

At this point, you’ve got your rewards sorted out, you have a few drafts of campaign videos, and you’re ready to build your Kickstarter page and begin planning the actual campaign.
1. Building your Kickstarter page (part 2)
2. Getting your press and campaign announcements organized
3. Planning sponsorships
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Step One: Building your Kickstarter Page (part 2)

About You Page
The next part to complete on your Kickstarter page is quite easy: The About You Page. Kickstarter tells you right on this page that this page is all about accountability. Perhaps reputation might be a better word for what you want to do here: "Important notes on accountability: Part of every creator's job is earning their backers’ trust, especially backers who don’t personally know them. It’s up to you to make the case that you can successfully bring your project to life. Present your qualifications and share links that help reinforce them."

The About You page is, as Kickstarter suggests, designed to tell your potential backers about why you’re qualified to carry out and complete this project. Who are you that anyone should trust you to get the work done? There are no guarantees for Kickstarter backers, and there have been lots of projects that have crashed and burned quite publicly, with lawsuits breaking out and accusations of fraud. You are not going to be that person, but you need your backers to know why you’re not going to be that person!

Profile Photos
Firstly, you should pick the right profile photo. You got your videographer to take some photos of you while the video was being shot, so pick a good one of you smiling and looking at the camera. A great professional profile shot looks a thousand times better than something of you sitting a Jacuzzi wearing a cowboy hat. Use a head-shot, rather than a full-body shot where people can’t see your face. You could use an action shot here that shows you doing something related to your project, but it should still focus on your face as the main image.

These images get cropped into a circle, so be sure to preview it and edit the image to fit correctly in the small circle that ends up being the image most people will see.

Your Bio
Your bio should include everything about you relevant to the project. Nobody wants to hear that you like country music and long walks on the beach here—keep it relevant to the project if you can.
Did you get a degree in your project’s category area?
Have you shown your work anywhere or given interviews with any major press about your work or the subject?
Are you involved in any industry organizations or charities related to your subject?
Have you successfully completed any related or similar projects?
In other words, a short version of your curriculum vitae as relates to your work, is all that is necessary to establish you as someone who is not a fly-by-night who is going to disappear with the Kickstarter funds to never be heard from again.
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What if you have nothing you’ve done professionally to show? Well, hopefully if you’ve followed my advice back in Chapter One, you’ve got something to add to show some reputation here. If you haven’t got anything, however, you may try to use this section to show your enthusiasm for the subject: “Jane Doe has been obsessed with potatoes from birth. Her first word was, in fact, ‘potato’. All through school, her projects have focused on potatoes and she can’t imagine doing anything other than making potato salad with her life. Her dream is to make the perfect potato salad. While she’s new to the professional world of potato salad, she’s convinced she’s found her life-long passion and is ready to pursue it 100%.”

Your Websites
You can add as many websites here as you like. The first one you put in will appear at the top and will be most the only one shown on your main page, so it should be your project website. Other options are to link your social media pages, your work’s profile of you, any major press for previous projects, and so on. Don’t overwhelm, though, pick 3 or 4 of the best places on the web to learn about you and your work.

Account Verification
You need to take several steps to verify and get your account approved before you can launch, including inputting bank information. This may vary by country, but follow the steps here to get verified. One note: For tax purposes or record keeping, you may think about setting up a separate account for the Kickstarter funds. If so, you need to do that before you fill out the bank information here. It won’t take long to get verified, so you can leave this step to a few weeks before launch.

Your Story
The Story section of the Kickstarter page is your main Kickstarter page. It’s what people are going to see and focus on. Kickstarter’s blog has a good summary of what a successful story contains: https://www.kickstarter.com/blog/one-question-six-creators-what-makes-a-good-project-page
Before talking about content, it’s worth mentioning a few practical things about the page:
1. You can edit the page as often as you like before and during your campaign (but not after the campaign is finished).
2. You are limited to 3000 characters of text, but unlimited in terms of what graphics you put into the page.
3. Your text layout options are limited to choosing Header types (font sizes). You cannot choose font style, or font colour, or any other aspect of text.
4. The Risks and Challenges section is mandatory
5. You cannot do an FAQ until your campaign is launched
6. You cannot make an Update until your campaign is launched.
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So now that you know that, go and look at some pages and see what they've done within those limitations:

1. Graphic headers are now the norm to overcome font limitations
2. Images are used more than text to provide information
3. Words are very carefully chosen (at least, for successful campaigns)

First, let’s deal with the Risks and Challenges

**Risks and Challenges**

You know in a job interview and you get the classic question, “What are your weaknesses?” This Risks and Challenges section is much like that. Many people waste this section and just say something ridiculous like “oh, there’s no risks or challenges” (“oh, I have no weaknesses except being a perfectionist”). There are always risks and challenges—what happens if you get ill or die—who will finish the project (are you part of a team?) What happens if there are skills you don’t have that you need (again, are you part of a team that can help you out?). What obstacles may prevent you from successfully completing on time and what steps have you taken to overcome those?

It helps if you can think seriously here. I personally won’t back a project unless they’ve thought through what the risks and challenges are. If they tell me that there are none, I run the other way. Don’t be afraid to add more than you think you need here. For example, I talked about how I had experience with long-term, multi-year projects in the past and how I had experience running a team and a project budget from past work. There are all kinds of things that you can’t foresee, but having experience—and talking about that experience—helps a lot. Just as the right answer in a job interview is to talk openly about what your weaknesses are and how you work to overcome them, the same applies here—what are the project’s potential pitfalls and weaknesses, and what steps are you taking to protect your backers from them?


And there are many more stories like this out there on the web. Stuff happens, and you need to mitigate that stuff.

**The Story: Content**

OK, so let’s talk content. The sections you probably need to have on the page may include:

1. About the project
2. About your team
3. Timeline
4. Budget—how you’ll spend the money
5. Reward details
6. Stretch goals

There are research articles that have analyzed the content of successful Kickstarter projects and quantified the important keywords people use, but the real key here is to be honest and clear, and precise. There’s a great saying in the academic world I’m fond of, “I would have written a shorter letter, but I didn’t have the time” (attributed to many, including Pascal, Mark Twain, T.S. Eliot, among others). It takes longer to write concisely than it does to waffle on for pages. Every word counts, so make every word count.

1. About the Project: Here you can provide details about the project: what is it, what will it do, why do you want to do this project, what does it mean to you. Make this a key part of your page, because it’s the most important!
2. About your Team: You most likely have a team of people helping you. It also helps to sell your credibility if you’re not doing this on your own—who are you going to turn to for help with the parts of your project that you can’t manage on your own?
3. Timeline: I like to see a timeline for longer projects that breaks down project stages in a realistic way. I’ve seen people say they’re going to make a feature-length film in 3 months, and just laughed. On the other hand, a well thought-through Gantt chart outlining the key steps that make sense and are realistic are a good way to get me to back your project, because I can see that you know what you’re doing.
4. Budget: not everyone puts a budget up, but I think transparency is the best policy. I’ve looked at projects and thought “You’re asking for $24,000 to go to a festival? What for?” and not backed the project. As a backer, I want to know how you’re spending the money. You can even go one step further and tell backers that you’ll put the projected and final budget up online so they can see where their money went. Chances are, you’ll spend more than you’ll make, so it won’t hurt to show backers that you didn’t take limos everywhere, but spent frugally and fairly. It also makes them feel less like a shopper and more like an investor, more like a part of the project.
5. Reward details: Here is a great place to show mock-up images of your rewards, and put up a rewards matrix to explain the tiers if there are many tiers. Mock-up images help people to visualize what it is that they’re getting in return for their funds. You can have your graphic designer do this, or purchase cheap mock-up templates from websites like Graphic River,* for about $5 each item and with a little Photoshop magic have your book cover, t-shirt or poster look like it’s already been made and ready to go. A great way to show your rewards information is in a handy matrix chart. Each tier can have a checkmark or other symbol to indicate whether the item is included in that tier. If you have many tiers, I’d recommend adding a matrix as the easiest way for people to see “what they get”.

* GraphicRiver [link](https://www.graphicsriver.net)
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Figure 3.1 The rewards matrix for this Kickstarter campaign is so complex, they even provided a downloadable chart!
Figure 3.2 GameLoading’s rewards matrix chart

People don’t like to read a lot on the internet, so the rule of thumb is “show don’t tell”. A pie chart for your budget, images of your rewards and a clear matrix or table, a Gantt chart or similar for your timeline, and so on. The more you can manage with graphics or infographics, the better (providing they are designed well!).

Some free resources for creating attractive-looking charts and infographics include: infogram (https://info.gram) and piktochart (http://piktochart.com). You can also create them in Microsoft Word, but they won’t be as attractive!

Here are a few great examples of graphics to tell the story:
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Figure 3.1 Kelvin and the Infinite Machine budget breakdown

Schedule

Assuming we meet our funding goal, the anticipated timeline is as follows:

For full disclosure, this is a very aggressive timeline and we really can’t have many things go wrong in order to get product out to our backers within this timeframe. In fact, in order for us to make this schedule a reality, we’re going to have to get a good sense that this project will fund by the end of September, early October.

While we’ve stated February 2015 as the anticipated ship date for the product backer rewards, we are going to give it our best effort to fulfill rewards by mid December 2014.

I’ve learned that just because you can make it work on paper, doesn’t mean it will work in reality). As much as we can control it, order fulfillment will be determined on a first come/first serve basis, so if getting product before Christmas is important to you, back us early and tell your friends!
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Figure 3.2 Schedule for the VSSL Kickstarter campaign

**Stretch Goals**
“Stretch goals” are goals above and beyond your initial goal. Let’s say I wanted $40,000 for my project to make a short film about potato salad. That $40K may get the bare-bones version of my project completed, but there’s some things I would love to do if I had more money: Let’s say, for the original amount I will license some stock music, but I want to hire a composer and orchestra to record the music, which will cost me another $10,000. So now I have a stretch goal of $50K.

The aims of stretch goals are really to:
1) have your backers increase their pledges
2) have people continue to back you after your goal has been reached

I'm going to probably go against the grain here and say that I prefer projects not to reveal stretch goals unless it is clear that they are going to achieve their original goal. I think it’s a bit embarrassing to see projects well below their original goals with stretch goals twice their main goal. Likewise, make sure you can really get your project done for your goal, and that these stretch goals really are a “bonus” that goes above and beyond what your aims for the project are, because if it’s clear that you're going to half-ass your project for your original amount, and really need a lot more (using my example above, let's say I have NO budget for music in my original), then people are going to run away.

I think it’s nicer to have some stretch goals planned out in advance, but announce them only as you are very close to achieving the previous goal, to keep people interested with content in your updates, and to motivate them to try to increase their pledge. This means, also, that they should be excited about your stretch goal. If it’s to pay for an accountant, they’re probably not motivated to fund that, but if it’s to add an extra 10-minute to your DVD or music album, that may be enough to encourage them to open up their wallets. I never like to see pages launch with stretch goals already on them—I feel like I’m wasting my money backing them because it looks like they couldn’t plan in advance what they really wanted.

Get feedback on your campaign story page, and get your graphic designer to work some magic on the graphics and images to make them attractive and quick to load. Check your page on mobile and see that the important parts stand out.

**Step Two: Getting your press and campaign announcements organized**
Press can be a difficult nut to crack. As more and more Kickstarter projects are released, you need a hook to get press interested and involved in your campaign. They’re getting bombarded with messages every day about people’s campaigns. You do need to take this step early, though, as it can take a month or more of lead time.
for items to appear, and you want press to come out during your campaign (not before, and not after!), so you’ll need to approach people early.

I made friends with some other Kickstarter campaigners during my campaign, and one with a related project was nice enough to send me their press list with contact emails once their campaign had finished. So it saved me a lot of trouble tracking down email contacts. Back a successful project similar to your own that’s getting some press, and see if they’re willing to share contacts with you. Be sure to pay that forward, later, if someone wants your contact list.

Don’t discount local press that may not be related to your project. The local paper may be happy to cover your project, given enough lead time. People are, I believe, more likely to back projects from their own town, so you never know if your old high school English teacher sees it in the local paper and backs you—local press can be a great resource, so be sure to keep them on your list of contacts. Like I said, give them some lead time—a month or two out, let them know who you are and ask if they’d be willing to cover you around the time of your campaign. This gives them time to plan, and if they have a break in their schedule that isn’t filled, they may get back to you and call you for an interview even if they originally hadn’t thought they would. Giving them that lead time makes it much better for them to be in that position.

Press Kits
Put together a press kit that can be put on your website and downloaded directly by link to a zip file. Inside, provide an overview, press release (see below), usable quotations, high-resolution images and contact information. What I mean by “usable quotations” are quotations by you that can be cut and pasted into an article, for those that are too busy to do an interview with you. These may or not get used, but they help to break up an article written by someone in a hurry. So instead of “Jane Doe is making a quilt about the potato famine and using potato salad recipes to illustrate the history. The potato famine was...” They can have useful quotes like Jane says, “It’s the first of its kind. It’s a comment about the history, how lucky we are today to have so much to eat, to remind people about times in history when people didn’t.” Okay, that was a really badly written quote, but you get the idea—it breaks up their text and helps them to tell the story. Write a good full page of these.

Finding the Right Press
Create a list of press—from blogs and podcasts to major magazines and newspapers—that cover the kinds of material that your project falls under. Get the names and email addresses not of the main editor, but for the writers that write the articles. For most of the smaller publishers, the writers are the ones who are going to pitch their story to their editors, more often than the editors are going to come to them asking them to cover the story. Follow the writers on Twitter if you can find
them—some may check out your project after reading your Twitter profile and save you the trouble of contacting them by contacting you first, if they're interested in your project.

Then, contact each of these writers and editors by email, and provide a very brief overview of your project. Note that most writers are getting emails daily saying “hi. I have a kickstarter project. Will you cover it?” Unless you’ve got something really original or popular to share, you’re going to have to find a hook other than the fact that it’s going to be on Kickstarter. Will it be the first potato salad quilt ever? Are you commemorating the Potato Famine with the potato salad quilt, and can you speak as an authority on the history of the Potato Famine to tell the story for them?

An example email might be:
“Hi John Doe. I recently came across your article “All about Potatoes” on the website Potatophilia, and I really enjoyed it! I’d like to draw your attention to my recent work that may be of interest to you: I’m planning a potato famine quilt. I’m well-known as the author of three books on potatoes, so I’d be very happy to conduct an interview to tell you all about the project and any background you might need. I’m going to be crowdfunding the project so I’m particularly looking for coverage during the month of September, but am open to anything. If you’d be interested in finding out more, my website is potatofaminequilt.com and a presskit can be downloaded directly from potatofaminequilt.com/presskit.zip. I can be contacted by email on this address or by phone, 555.555.5555”

Contacting them this far in advance gives them some options to look into your work, talk to their editors about doing a story, and get some background together for a really good story. However, I would caution you to try to remind them of your campaign being during a specific period and that you’d like coverage during that period. I watched one campaign get some significant coverage a full 10 days in advance of their campaign launch. In the Internet world, 10 days is a very, very long time and I’m sure the vast majority of people reading the article forgot all about the campaign by the time of launch. If they’re going to cover you in advance of your campaign, try to have it as close to campaign as possible, and be sure you have your own website set up to take orders and create mailing lists when the story runs, in case people can’t wait.

**Press Releases**

Have a press release ready to go for launch day. There are many examples of press releases online that you can download, but a brief overview is as follows: a catchy headline (find a hook that makes it stand out), communicate the who-what-when-where-why and hows of your story clearly in a few tight paragraphs. Provide contact information.
Once you’ve written your press release, get it ready to go for launch day by running it by a friend who can spell and has correct grammar! You want the press release to be ready to send it out on the morning of your launch day. The question becomes, then, where to send it? The answer to this is going to be dependent on your project’s area. There are many unscrupulous websites that will offer to post your release for you for a price. Don’t waste your money, spend your time finding the right places to submit the release.

**Failing to Find Press**

You may struggle to get much of a response out of press. They do tend to snowball, so getting into one place can help. Don’t turn down offers because you think they’re too small, but don’t waste time either. I had people contact me asking to do a video podcast interview for a generic show about Kickstarter projects, and when I checked them out, their last video had only 27 people watch it over the past six months. On the other hand, if there is a podcast about potato salad specifically, and it only has 27 followers, it still may be worth your time because those 27 people are serious about potato salad and may not only become backers, but big advocates of your project!

If you have trouble mobilizing press on your behalf, don’t panic. If everything else about your campaign is successful, press will not make or break your project. My statistics showed that about 15% of my backers were coming directly from press links. It made a difference, but not as much as you would think, and I had significant coverage from major players in my area, games (including Engadget, Polygon, and Kotaku).

**Step Three: Finding Sponsors**

You’ve written your story, you’ve got your website up, you’re building reputation and you’re mobilizing your press. One last thing to do this month is to think about sponsorships. You may think that sponsors mean selling out and you’re crowdfunding precisely because you don’t want to have any association with any organization or corporation, but if you’re not considering all of your options, you’re really missing out on a potential significant boost to your campaign.

Are there people out there who may be willing to sponsor your project, and if so, what can you offer them in return? What kinds of people can you approach for sponsorships? Think long and hard, and outside of the box. Kickstarter campaigns can garner a lot of attention, and even unsuccessful campaigns are usually seen by thousands of people—for companies or organizations looking to get some exposure, having their logo on your website and Kickstarter page is great exposure. Particularly if you’re in a niche area and you’re going to attract people who are their core market.
Sponsors can serve some significant purposes during your campaign:

1. They can be an important source of revenue
2. They can give you credibility
3. They can be a source of press coverage and help to promote your campaign
4. They bring in more sponsors
5. They can bring stuff to give away as rewards

What you offer to sponsors in exchange is up to you to think through, but you could offer just web presence and social media shout-outs, to logos placed in a visible location inside your project (film, game, ??), to having the backs or sleeves of t-shirts branded with a logo, to announcing their name at the start of your podcast, or whatever else you can come up with.

Then, you need to set a fair and attractive price on the sponsorship, bearing in mind that you are getting more than the money involved.

Let me provide you with some examples from my own experience:

One sponsor came on board with a cash donation that they promised to match every dollar pledged for a number of days up to a certain amount: they helped to promote it on their social media networks, and so it became a mutual benefit. Another sponsor made us a more official partner for a project and sent out a press release using their own PR company to outline our working with them. It was a great way to get the attention of press that we'd otherwise failed to get, because now there was a great hook outside the campaign itself.

Sponsors give you credibility that you're not some fly-by-night operation. If you have a recognizable brand (or even a not-very-recognizable one) associated with your project, you bring with it their credibility. Particularly with recognizable sponsors, I would see that on a campaign page and think “well, X wouldn't have sponsored them if they didn't think it was going to be great, because they wouldn't want their brand on it if it was just some garbage”. It shows you've gained the trust of some important people, and that your backers can trust you, too.

One mistake I made was not getting sponsors on board before my campaign launch. I still got many sponsors in the six-week campaign that I ran, and many more were coming to me by the end of the campaign wanted to be associated with my success. The reason it became an issue was that some sponsors wanted to give things away during the campaign to my backers, and as we know from setting things up on our page, you can't change your rewards after launch.

I've seen a few different approaches to this problem: 1) start a new tier with the “bonus” item thrown in. (confusing because your graphics you’ve got done won’t reflect that), or 2) offer a deal to “the next 50 backers will get a free Sponsor T-shirt thrown in”. This latter option is difficult, because as backers drop out or change pledges, their backer numbers may change, and if you said “from backer 250 to backer 300”, and now backer 250 is backer 249 because someone dropped, it's
going to get really confusing. You may have people cancel their pledge and then
rejoin to get into that range to get the additional item. Also, you need to think about
if you’re offering a new deal where you can get the original potato doll for $20, but
now you can get a potato doll and a t-shirt for $20 (if your sponsor wants a give-
away for free), someone may want the new deal instead and cancel their original
pledge. Not a significant problem, really, but just beware that things can get
confusing quickly.

The easiest way to deal with this problem is to try to line up your sponsorships in
advance! That way you can incorporate them into your graphics and page design,
and your rewards. Sponsors can work their connections to get word out about your
campaign, and everyone benefits.

You can find and customize Sponsorship Agreement forms online. Essentially, you
want a document that spells out the details of what each of you will provide to the
other. Are you asking Sponsors to back you on Kickstarter or send you money
privately? If it’s on Kickstarter, what happens if you don’t hit your goal? They’ve got
the advertising out of you, but you don’t have the money in return. On the other
hand, sponsoring through Kickstarter raises the numbers of backers and total
dollars backed, and can provide a much-needed boost in the early days of your
campaign.

Checklist: Two Months Out

- Complete your Kickstarter page and get more feedback
- Verify your account information with Kickstarter
- Complete first draft of Your Story and get feedback
- Make infographics for your timeline and budget
- Get a list of press contacts.
- Make a press kit
- Write your press release
- Make a list of potential sponsors and come up with sponsorship plans. Begin
  contacting sponsors
- Begin contacting press
Phase 4: The month before launch

Hopefully by now you’re excited to see the campaign coming together. You’ve got lots of things organized and you’re gaining some momentum. Now is not the time to drop the ball—keep that momentum up through to your launch day!

You should be tweaking your Kickstarter page now based on feedback at this stage, so there isn’t a lot more to do on the page except keep improving it based on feedback.

There are some final things to take care of before you launch, including planning your advertising campaign, mobilizing your team, following up on press, finalizing your budget, submitting to Kickstarter, and planning out the campaign details.

Step One: Get advertising organized

Wait a minute, isn’t advertising cheating? That’s actually what I thought when I initially considered advertising my campaign. But the more I thought about, the more I thought, well, why the hell not give it a shot? Advertising on Twitter and Facebook is a lot easier and cheaper than you think, and you can target a specific demographic or keyword, which increases your chances of getting some interest in your project.

Advertising isn’t cheating, and I’d recommend setting aside a very modest advertising budget—$100 or so is enough to get going. You can pay per click on Facebook and Twitter so if you’re not getting any engagement, you don’t pay very much at all. If you do get engagement—if you can translate that click into backing you, it’s more than worth the money invested.

With Twitter, you can advertise by choosing keywords related to your topic. So you can tell Twitter to send your “sponsored” Tweet to anyone using the #potatosalad hashtag, or people who are interested in #recipes, and so on. Craft your sponsored Tweet carefully, because you want to engage people. Prepare some different Tweets to try out so you can change the Tweet that goes out during your campaign to try to appeal to different people.

With Facebook, you can choose some general demographics and interests. If you know that you have a specific demographic, then it doesn’t make sense to try to hit everyone. I didn’t start advertising until the 3rd week of my campaign, and at that point I could see that 95% of my backers were male, so I didn’t bother advertising to women. I’m a woman and I’d back my project, but since most of the support was coming from men, it made much more sense to preach to the converted, so to speak.
A Facebook ad is a bit more detailed than Twitter and involves an image and a short hook with a link, so prepare a few in advance and they'll be ready to go. Facebook will send your ad back if you include too much text in your graphic, so be careful with the image that you choose. Ask your friends and followers to come up with campaign ideas for your ads—they have to be short and sweet, and draw your audience in. Track your ads (both provide their own analytics for you) so you can immediately change the ad if it’s not getting any response.

Your ad should draw people to your Kickstarter page, because that’s what you want right now, but if that feels too spammy to you, you could also draw them to your Facebook page, for instance, and then follow up with a private message to them if they like your page.

**Step Two: Begin to mobilize your troops**

Kickstarter has some unknown algorithms running behind the scenes that I don’t think anyone has been able to figure out. I’ve read that the number of backers on any given day can push you into the “popular” section of the site. I’ve also read that you need to be a “staff pick” to get into that section. I can’t say, but it certainly doesn’t hurt to begin with a bang and try to maintain that momentum through the month. A few days before your campaign, let all of your followers and friends and family know that you’re about to launch and ask them to back you on launch day so you can start out really strong. It can be difficult with family, because many of them will not know what Kickstarter is, and won’t understand what you’re doing or the importance of the campaign to you, so you need to explain Kickstarter and your project, to family, friends and followers.

Your first day should rocket you to the top of the Popular section! The more time you can spend being “Popular”, the more followers you can get through the Kickstarter site itself. My own campaign brought in nearly one third of its money from people finding us on Kickstarter, so it’s a good idea to put some effort into getting and keeping some visibility within Kickstarter. It helps to start really strong, in other words, because that momentum will snowball. Explain this to your friends and followers, because they’ll be more likely to help you out if they know that just a few dollars (or even one dollar!) will help to get you more dollars by making you “popular”.

**Step Three: Follow up with Press**

Check in with any press you’ve got lined up, and those that didn’t reply, and confirm your launch date for them. Keep it short and sweet, and let them know you’re launching your campaign on time. Sometimes it just takes a second message for someone to glom onto your project, but don’t harass any writers with too many messages—just a polite, short email to let them know that you’re launching on Monday (or whatever) and that you’re available for interviews and would appreciate any support. If you can, tie it in with a recent article that they wrote—try
to get them to see that you've done the legwork on them and aren't just sending out
the same message to a thousand press contacts.

**Step Four: Finalize your Budget**
Ok, up to now we've been working on a kind of guestimate budget. Now's the time to
figure out exactly what you need.

Add up all of your fixed costs for your project: these are costs that cannot be
negotiated any farther, and will not vary (beyond currency exchange rates!). We'll
call this F.

Now take your best estimate for variable costs. These may be payments that you've
promised people (“hey, if we hit our goal, I’ll give you 5% of what we make”). I’d
make a high estimate and err on the side of caution. Let’s call this “V”

Now take your best estimate for your rewards fulfillment. Remember to include
shipping costs. Again, take a high estimate. How can you estimate how many people
will pledge at each level? If you want to get a really good estimate, check out at least
10 or 20 projects that are somewhat similar to your own and see how many backers
they got at each pledge level (approximate dollar amount). Most people pledge at
around the $20-$25 mark, but you’ll also get quite a few at higher amounts if the
rewards are worth it. All you can do at this stage is take a best guess, based on your
analysis of similar projects with similar rewards.

There’s a great website with an online calculator that will help you to calculate all of
your reward costs: [http://reubenpressman.com/kickstarter/](http://reubenpressman.com/kickstarter/)
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Figure 4.1 “Think Before You Kickstart” Rewards cost estimator

So, your subtotal (S) costs are your fixed costs plus your variable costs plus your rewards fulfillment, so $S = (F + V + R)$.

Now add ten percent for Kickstarter’s cut for the Total, $T_1 = (S \times 1.10)$.

Now add another ten percent contingency! $T_2 = (T_1 \times 1.10)$.

The second total, $T_2$ is your goal. Remember, if you don’t hit your goal you don’t get anything, so keep your budget as tight as you can to make sure you’ve got a reasonable goal. Look at what similar projects are making and make sure you’re in that range. The vast majority of successful projects have goals under $10,000. Sure, you hear about the big ones making millions, but those are really rare.

One final aspect that may impact your costs and your budget is taxes. Depending on your jurisdiction and the items you’re selling on Kickstarter, you may be on the hook for taxes. Call your local tax authority to determine if you’re going to have to pay taxes on the items you’re selling. Remember, you may also have to pay taxes on the Kickstarter funds you get, depending on your jurisdiction. If you’re not an official business in the eyes of your tax authority, you could have to forfeit a considerable percentage of your Kickstarter income to taxes.

Step Five: Submit your project to Kickstarter

Kickstarter has an approval system that can check your page and make sure that everything is in order before you launch. You have the option of skipping this step, but it only takes a few days, and as far as I can see it certainly doesn’t hurt. I didn’t
get any useful advice beyond “Add a video” (at that time, I hadn’t yet uploaded my video, which I was still finishing up). But, I don’t know whether or not this approval is automated or if a person is looking at it. If a person is indeed checking it, then it never hurts to have someone at Kickstarter look at your page. One of your aims during your campaign is to catch the notice of Kickstarter so you may become a lucky “Staff Pick” or, even, a “Project of the Day”. It’s also good to have the clearance before launch so they’re not coming back to you later and telling you that you can’t offer that item that 200 people have already backed you at. This happened to one project that I backed, VSSL, which made survival kit tubes. As a joke, they had a kit called the “Zombie” toolkit, with stake to drive through a zombie’s head. A couple of weeks into the campaign they had to make the announcement that this was classified as a weapon and not allowed by Kickstarter. They were still immensely successful, but it could have done some real damage to their campaign.

Figure 4.2 VSSL Zombie kit: Banned by Kickstarter (image by gearshout.net)

**Step Six: Planning Campaign details**

A few things surprised me during my campaign, but the one I was least prepared for was the number of people volunteering to help out with my project. Now, I’ve been around the block a few times and I’m well aware that a lot of people want to “volunteer” when what they really want is to step in at the end and say that they were involved, when they really did nothing. I’m very leery about taking on volunteers. But it was difficult when people started volunteering to do specific aspects of the project, and they hadn’t yet pledged any money. I wanted them to pledge, so I had to find a way to turn them down nicely. Fortunately I had a good excuse, in that there are tax breaks and grants in Canada for independent films as long as the production is created by at least 90% Canadians. This excluded just about everyone who volunteered to work on the film, so I had a good reason why they couldn’t volunteer, and let them know that the best way to help would be to back the project and help spread the word. It’s difficult to say “no” to people during your campaign because you want to please everyone. Plan in advance how you might tackle these kinds of requests. Maybe you want to take them on as volunteers—decide now, though, so you’re prepared and can respond appropriately.
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Consider hiring a Virtual Assistant for the Campaign
If you’re doing everything right, things are about to get really crazy. You may consider having one or more virtual assistants ready to go by hiring them in advance. I use O-Desk myself, and didn’t use them for my campaign, but I’m using them to help manage things now that I’m fulfilling rewards.

Planning time off work
Have you checked that you can get time off work for your campaign? If that’s going to be difficult, then plan to launch on a Friday night, like I did, so you have the weekend to hustle your first few days. If you can, get the first few days off work, and the last week off work (or at least the last few days). Now is the time to book that time off work, so plan out how you’re going to manage the campaign and your day job.

Checklist: From One Month Out to Launch Day
- Get some potential ad copy written and get feedback on it.
- Start pushing your Kickstarter campaign to followers—contact people individually to let them know of your launch date
- Follow up with press to let them know you’re about to launch
- Finalize your budget
- Submit project to Kickstarter
Phase 5: Launching the campaign: Your first week

Step One: The practical things: The first day
Now that you’ve just launched, there’s a few things to take care of right away:

Get a Tiny URL: You can use a site like tinyurl.com or bit.ly to shorten the long link on your Kickstarter page into something easier to share, particularly on Twitter where characters are critical. Kickstarter actually has its own tiny URL: kck.st The way to find your tiny URL on Kickstarter is to click the “embed” button below your video, and the popup window has the tiny link.

Send out your press release: Add your tiny URL to your Press release and get that sent off right away to your press contacts and your press release sites.

Launch your advertising: Use your tiny URL and get your ads launched.

Add the Kickstarter widget/link to your homepage: Be sure to put the Kickstarter embed widget onto your homepage of your website so everyone who visits your site knows you’re running a campaign! You can embed the Kickstarter widget into your site to provide up to date information on your project. The widget is a useful item that you can also share with your followers and ask them to post on their own pages.

Figure 5.1 The Kickstarter widget: Note size options for video. Below the widget on the right is your Kickstarter tiny URL.
**Step Two: Set up an FAQ**

An FAQ, or “Frequently Asked Questions” section of your Kickstarter page is a useful place to add additional information that you couldn’t fit into your main page, or just didn’t want to clutter your home page with. FAQs can actually be the frequently asked questions that you anticipate, but they can also be just additional useful information for backers. You can’t set this up before you launch, but you can immediately after you launch. If you’re getting questions on your Comments section, set up the answers to these questions in the FAQ. Keep adding to the FAQ throughout your campaign.

**FAQ**

- Do you use organic or fair trade coconuts?

Great question! At this point, we would LOVE to source organic and fair trade coconuts but this market for coconuts isn’t quite as developed as for coffee and chocolate. Ideally, we will help to create the demand for sustainably-grown coconuts in order to increase transparency along the coconut supply chain. Believe us, we want more than anything to source responsibly, but we need to build the purchasing volume in order to make these types of demands from our suppliers.

Last updated: Sun, Aug 19 2012 10:54 AM EDT

[Ask a question]

[Report this project to Kickstarter]

Figure 5.2 A sample FAQ, from the Dang Coconut Chips
(https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/vincentkit/dang-coconut-chips)

**Step Three: Start tweaking your project based on analytics**

There are some analytics available to you only, through the Kickstarter website, and there are others that are very useful and publicly available. Through the Kickstarter website, you get updated information regarding:

1. How many people have backed your project
2. How much money they’ve spent (totals)
3. Average backer amount
4. How many of each reward tier has been backed
5. How many plays your video has and from where (direct or embedded in another website), and what percentage of times your video was watched from start to finish.
6. Referring traffic links

Some of this information can be quite useful: Are people watching your campaign video to the end? If not, is the information that they really need to see at the start of your video, or can you shorten your video?
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Do you have a really low average backer amount (the average is between $20-$40)? How can you tweak your rewards to increase the amount that people are spending when they are backing you?

Where are backers coming from—are you mobilizing those social networks and leveraging your advertising or can you improve those links? Did someone you don’t even know about link to your page and you’re getting lots of traffic from them (if so, go find out and get in touch with them—they may be willing to do a follow up with you interviewed and it might improve even more!)

Figure 5.3 My Kickstarter analytics overall funding progress

Figure 5.4 My Kickstarter analytics—internal (Kickstarter) and external referrers, and average pledge amount per backer
Figure 5.5 Kickstarter referrer detail information: how many backers were coming from within and without Kickstarter, and how much they were spending. Note that press weren’t a huge amount, but my own website was responsible for 13.33% of the overall amount pledged.

Figure 5.6 Project video statistics. Most videos were viewed through an embedded widget other people put on their websites.
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Figure 5.7 Kickstarter rewards breakdown: which were the most popular tiers and how much money was pledged for each reward.

There are other websites online that will give you some analytics, but they can’t give you the same information as Kickstarter because they don’t have the referring information or know how many people watched your video. For instance, Kicktraq was the site I found most useful. It has a simple widget that you can even embed in your home page. Kicktraq (http://www.kicktraq.com/) gives you a great statistical summary without you having to do the math—what percentage of your goal have you hit, for instance. It tells you how much you need to do per day from that point forward to hit your goal. And it makes some projections. Be sure to take the projections with a grain of salt, since they are based on the previous 24 hour period (at least, at time of writing), and so having one good day can suddenly make it look like you’re a millionaire, and one bad day can put you down in the dumps. The best part of Kicktraq is just the visualization of your data, so you can see where you’re at and how far you’ve come (and how far you have to go).
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**Figure 5.8** A Kicktraq overview of a project, Lunar Mission One.

**Figure 5.9** Kicktraq embeddable mini-chart. These kinds of charts are useful for gauging the amount that people pledge over time.

You can spend the entire day chasing analytics and obsessing over the numbers, but at the end of the day, you’re better off spending your time improving your numbers,
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rather than analyzing them. Check the analytics and see if they tell you anything useful, but beyond that, don’t expend too much energy obsessing over them.

**Step Four: Beware the spam messages, but answer the real messages!**
The first week of my campaign, I got some spam messages on Kickstarter through their messaging system. Some promised to back me if I backed their project. Others offered to handle the post-Kickstarter backer rewards. Some threatened legal action if I didn’t give them $50,000 cash! Don’t panic: Just report them as spam and move on. I don’t recommend the back-me-and-I’ll-back-you route, either: The problem with this is, you will back them and their project will run out first. They can then cancel their backer pledge to you, and there’s nothing you can do about it.

You’ll get some other random spammy-type messages: People wanting you to participate in their school survey project about crowdfunding, people wanting you to help them with whatever. People wanting freebies. You may also get requests to do various podcast or other interviews that talk about Kickstarter projects. Do your homework on the podcast or blog and make sure it’s going to be worth your time. Just be aware that you’re going to get these messages, and that you don’t need to answer them.

In addition to spam, you will get questions from backers (people who have already pledged, and have a question) and questions from non-backers who may back you. Be sure you check your messages regularly and respond as quickly as possible.

Likewise, you’ll start getting Comments on your site—pay attention to these, because you can miss them in all the messages that you’re getting. If you’ve got a team, have someone checking and replying to these messages as quickly as possible (this is where a virtual assistant can come in handy if you don’t have a team).

**Step Five: Start hitting the streets**

It’s time to get out there and do the legwork that goes on behind the scenes now. I had so many people contact me during my campaign wanting to know how I was successful, but when I asked what they were doing to leverage their contacts, they had no reply. If you’ve got 400 “friends” on Facebook, it’s time to contact each one of those friends, individually and personally. If you belong to professional organizations, clubs, or church groups, now is the time to get in touch with people and tell them about your project. Is it difficult to talk up your work? Hell, yes. I had the hardest time with this one task during my campaign, and I had a lot of anguish when I’d work up the guts to ask friends and would sometimes get no response at all. The important thing to remember is that your friends, like you I’m sure, get lots of requests and demands on your time and money, and they, like you, can’t always do everything and support everyone. Try not to take it personally if you get a negative response or no response. They may be having financial problems you’re not aware of and too embarrassed to talk about it, so may choose silence over that.
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discussion. You can let them know that even a dollar gets your numbers up and helps you hit that “popular” page, so they don’t have to give you a lot. Put it in terms of “would you do the equivalent of buying me a coffee, and I’ll get you next time?” Remember that there is a mental barrier to signing up to a new website and giving credit card information for a lot of people, so ask if they’ve ever used Kickstarter before and ask for feedback on your story. The trick is, get them involved and get them feeling that they’re a part of the project. Some tactics you can try so you don’t feel so “dirty” are: asking them for advice, not financial support: Do they have any ideas about people you could approach? Do they know anyone who might be interested in sponsoring? Do they have any contacts in the press?

I approached all kinds of people for “advice”, when I was really just using that as a way to get them aware of and interested in the project: Advice on how to approach press, advice on the video production, and so on. Hey, you’re on Kickstarter, you’re a creative person, so get creative in how to approach your friends. It’s damn hard, but if you want to be successful, you have to overcome this barrier. Many successful Kickstarter projects are people funding their friends and family for small amounts, not strangers coming in and pledging a fortune. Don’t forget to share your success with them later, and give them a personal thanks, which reminds me--

**Step Six: Thank your backers**

The number one thing I can recommend that I did during my campaign was such a simple touch, but made all the difference: I thanked my backers. Personally, individually, each and every one received a message from me. Once someone has backed you, you can send them a message through Kickstarter’s messaging system. You can also find out some basic information about them, usually what city/country they live in, how much they pledged, their avatar, and how many other projects they’ve backed. I tried to personalize my messages to backers as much as possible: If they were Canadians, I told them how the crew were Canadian and that we were going to source as much as possible of our rewards in Canada. If they were from a city that I’ve visited in the past, I talked about my visit to their city a little. If I spoke a little bit of their language, I wrote a thank-you note in that language (in my case, Swedish, some really bad Spanish and French). I commented on their avatar if there was something of note in the image. I commented on the large number of projects they backed. In other words, I showed them that this wasn’t a copy-and-pasted message from a personal assistant, but an honest message from me to them. I kept it short and simple, and I did not ask for anything else from them (not even to “spread the word”). I just told them that I appreciated their contribution to my project, and thanked them.

This little touch had an enormous response. Some backers increased their pledges and commented on how nice it was to get a personal message. One backer, through various conversations that continued by email later, eventually changed a $15 pledge to over $1350. That’s right—a huge increase simply because I took the time to get to know him and let him see how passionate I was about my project. Over the
course of the project’s development we met up with him and got him involved, and became friends.

Other backers, I am sure, went and spread the word because they appreciated the fact that I’d gone and done something special for them. It’s very uncommon to get thanked on Kickstarter—in the 50 or so projects I’ve backed, I’ve never gotten a personal thank-you. I’ve gotten a few form-letter thank you messages, but mostly I get no response at all. A thank you stands out.

Thanking your backers has another effect—it breaks the ice with the backers and makes you approachable. Quite a few people I thanked wrote back and had a question about my work, and I got a few invitations to do some guest speaking, interviews, and so on, simply because I’d taken that step to break the ice with them and show them that I was there on the other end of the “line” and willing to chat. That’s why it’s important to make it personal, not a form letter.

Most importantly, talking to your backers creates a real sense of community around your project, which I believe is the single most important key to my success. People were commenting on the site that “we” were going to make our goal, and got excited and involved. One backer invited me to give a talk at a meeting that was going to be held a few weeks later. Not only did I accept, but I also invited a bunch of my other backers who I’d never met but who were from Toronto. About five of them showed up, and we all got to chat with each other, share ideas, and get excited about our projects. That is exactly what Kickstarter is about, if you ask me. If you can create a community around your project, you will be successful. Even if I hadn’t been successful in my funding, I would have made a tremendous group of contacts of like-minded folk who were interested in my work and wanted to be a part of it. You can’t buy that kind of networking!!

The downside to all this thanking and chatting with your backers is that it really is a full-time job. I was working 16 hours a day, 7 days a week during my campaign just chatting online with people. My hands were cramped and crippled in pain some days. If you have a team, it’s great to share this duty. Don’t hire it out to someone who’s not part of your team, though. I’m a firm believer in personally thanking everyone who gives me money, and it comes across as fake if you hire out the task of thanking people!

**Step Seven: Celebrate your successes and presses**

Did a popular press cover your campaign? Put their logo and a quote up on your page! Link to the article. Don’t be afraid to keep updating your page with the latest information—during my campaign, we had a nearly daily update to the press coverage we were getting. Putting up all those logos and links helped our credibility, and other smaller press began to contact us because they wanted their logo up there, too, so were willing to write up an article in exchange for that. Again, you’re creating a community, and press can be a part of that community.
Step Eight: Provide an Avatar

One thing one of my early backers requested was that I provide an avatar image saying “backer” for my project so that they could back other projects and show off the graphic that they were a backer of my own project. I was happy to oblige, and one of my first updates (see below) was an image and information telling people how to change their avatar to support us. Get an image of the right size with your project name/logo and the word “Backer” on and a few people will use it. I’m not sure if it does any direct good at all, but it certainly doesn’t hurt, and it does help people to feel that they’re involved and helping you out, which is really important. Of course, they can also use the avatar outside Kickstarter, and you can encourage them to do so, to help spread the word during your campaign.
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Figure 5.11 Kickstarter avatar for my project: could have used some work, if I’d had the time and thought about it in advance!

**Step Nine: Posting Updates**

Once your campaign is rolling, you may want to send out a few updates. I used these sparingly, because I know from being on the other side of the campaign that if there are too many updates I just unsubscribe from them all. I’d recommend one update on the second day, and one or two more a week until the last week.

Updates can include the latest sponsors to come on board, new ideas that have come out of discussions with backers, press coverage, or other information that may be of interest to your backers or to other people looking for more information on your project, but without you wanting to crowd your main page with this information.

It’s really important to be aware that once an update is posted, you have 30 minutes to change it before it’s posted and unchangeable. It goes out to your backers during that 30 minutes, so if there’s an error, it’s too late when you hit “publish”.

Updates can be as fancy as your original page, and many people make graphics and so on for their updates. You can also set them as backer-only or public. I think during the campaign your goal is to get as many backers as possible, so there is no reason to make these backer-only.

One thing I did during the first week is post a personal video message. This wasn’t a fancy professionally produced video, just me and my webcam, thanking everyone for their support. I think having the video there makes a bit of a difference, rather than just text. I just linked to the video in my update. That means that I can remove the video later, since it’s not locked into a Kickstarter page.

One tactic I did during my campaign—and I think it was successful—was to hold back information for a weekly update. It gave me something to send out and keep momentum and interest going, and it gave us something to tweet about beyond just “hey, back us”. For me, this was a list of people who I would be interviewing for my documentary, and so people were coming back and increasing their pledges when they got really excited. I am not entirely sure that this was the best strategy, because people during the first week may have thought that we were a bit sparse on content, but by the end certainly people were getting really excited. We also offered press exclusives on some of this information, so that they could be the first to announce it to their followers, and some press liked this idea. It gave them content that nobody else had, and made it look like they got the scoop.

A fantastic way to get some extra momentum going is to post about other projects that you’re excited about—contact the other project first and let them know you’re going to do that and ask them which graphic they’d prefer that you use. That way, they know that you’re going to include them on one of your updates and most likely
they’ll choose to reciprocate. Every time I sent out an Update, I’d include one or more references to other campaigns in the works that I was backing, and explain what I liked about them. Remember that Kickstarter has a barrier to newcomers who may be a bit shy about signing up to a new site: By targeting people already backing other projects, you’ve got a great market of people who are already familiar with the Kickstarter process. If you can do some well-targeted Update announcement swaps, that alone can be a deciding factor in your success. The other projects can also send out Tweets on your behalf (and vice versa). The key here is to find projects with similar backers to your own, or projects that are put together by an existing backer of your own project already. Back them, and then contact them and tell them you’re going to give them a shout-out. Don’t ask them to do the same, because it comes across as spam. I made some great contacts this way and started up some useful conversations. Particularly after my project was a success, people new to the site were coming back and asking advice, sharing ideas, and I even keep in touch with some of them still. Again: Kickstarter is a community (are you getting it yet?), and the more that you can create that sense of community, the more successful that you will be.
The Secrets to a Successful Kickstarter Campaign

French, German, Spanish and Japanese!

We've still got more stretch goals. Any money we can make from the Kickstarter is going right back into our film project, so more money will mean we can license more tracks and get more music to you!

Some More Interesting Kickstarters

If you're looking for somewhere else to spend some money, we're backing these two great-sounding games!

**NOCT** [https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/351030998/noct](https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/351030998/noct)

Explore a ruined world filled with ancient nightmarish creatures from a time long forgotten. I love it when indie devs put time and money into the sound of their games. Noct has style and substance, and I'm really hoping this project gets funded.

![Noct](image)

**Age of Grit**


![Age of Grit](image)

Figure 5.12 One of my updates, pointing people to other Kickstarters that I thought deserved some support

**Checklist: First Week of Campaign**

- Get a tiny URL
- Send out press release
- Launch ads
- Add a Kickstarter widget to your home page
- Set up an FAQ
- Check out your analytics and tweak your project accordingly
- Do the grunt work and get your team contacting everyone they know
- Answer all messages and comments quickly
- Thank your backers
The Secrets to a Successful Kickstarter Campaign

Put press up on your page
Give your backers an avatar
Post updates regularly and share other Kickstarter campaigns
Phase 6: During the campaign: Weeks two and three

You can expect a bit of a lull during the middle of your campaign. It’s a great time to get caught up on press and follow up with sponsorship opportunities, as well as keep in touch with your backers and friends/family/followers. Don’t quit on people—keep knocking on those doors. Kickstarter is one of those things that other people look on and think you just sit back and the money rolls in. It doesn’t. You know that now, so get out there and get to work!

Keep updates coming if something important happens. One campaign I was part of sent out a questionnaire during the campaign promising a bonus object for everyone who answered the questionnaire—it was a simple marketing questionnaire, something like “how would you describe this product to your friends”, but it kept people engaged, and having that hold-back item you’d throw in for free to all backers is always nice!

Step One: Consider a live chat or other means to communicate and “meet” you

I did one live chat session where people could type in messages and I’d respond live on video, and had some success with this format. It takes a bit of setting up (I used a Google Hangout to facilitate), but is well worth it to keep momentum and foster that sense of community. Again, if people can feel that they’re a part of the project, they’re much more likely to help you out by spreading the word or pledging more. If you’re not tech savvy enough to work out Google Hangouts, consider even a live text-based chat session somewhere online. There are many chat sites that offer private “rooms”, or you can even just offer a specific chat time on your Facebook page and tell people you’ll respond to messages in real-time for a specific period of time. Take a look at where your backers are coming from first and make sure your timing is going to catch the right market. If you’re on the East coast, but all your backers are West coast, then having your chat at 5pm EST isn’t going to help those people who may be at work at that time.

You can even do a recorded video podcast where you talk about your project and provide some kind of presentation followed by a chat session, so people who are on the fence about the project can watch it later on YouTube or wherever you post the video.

Step Two: Understanding Projects of the Day and Staff Picks

I was lucky to be both a Project of the Day and a Staff Pick that went out in the Kickstarter newsletter, and I got a considerable amount of backers off those two elements. I can’t say what made Kickstarter select my project over the thousands of others, but I will say this: They didn’t tell me! I accidentally noticed that I was
The Secrets to a Successful Kickstarter Campaign

Project of the Day: I never received an email or anything from them saying that I’d been chosen, so don’t forget to check, yourself, how your project is doing on Kickstarter’s pages. Likewise, I found out from a backer that I was a staff pick and in the newsletter, since I wasn’t a subscriber to the newsletter myself at the time. Somehow, I caught the attention of someone on staff at Kickstarter, and they decided to feature me. All I can say is, I think they noticed how involved that I was with my backers and appreciated the work I was putting in.

You’ll see badges that some people put on their graphic saying “Staff pick”. There is currently no official way to present this information, so you can do a Google-image search and find a badge to put on your own graphic. I wouldn’t recommend doing that if you’re not a staff pick, of course, but there is no procedure in place for indicating that you were a staff pick or a project of the day.

If you do happen to be project of the day, do not add “Project of the Day” badges to your graphic that day: Kickstarter wants the images presented clear and free of clutter, and so don’t add your own to their already-graphicked up image for your header!

![Staff Pick Badge]

Figure 6.1 My Kickstarter video with a Staff Pick badge on. Note that when you change your header graphic, the video image will automatically update.

**Step Three: Dealing with Cancelled pledges and the Crazy that is Kickstarter**

I must have backed about 25 projects before I realized that you can adjust or cancel your pledge at any point during a campaign up until the end. I was surprised when it happened to my campaign. What went wrong? Did they change their mind? Did they not have enough money? Did they not like something I said? Don’t agonize over this, because the truth is, you’ll never know, unless they suddenly leave in droves after you say something nasty! People will drop pledges, so remember, just because you’re near your goal doesn’t mean you’re near your goal! Keep fighting all through the month. It’s exhausting, it’s draining, it’s emotionally the craziest thing you may ever go through, but you have to keep going.
A big concern will be if you get a major backer that puts you into the “successfully funded” region, and they may pull out later and suddenly you’re “unfunded” range again! I nearly had a heart attack when what put me over my goal was a $5K sponsorship deal. If that sponsor had decided to pull out, for the next few days I was on edge that I’d be “unfunded” again. Sure, I may have gotten sympathy money from backers if that had happened, but I can’t express how much of a strain it is to watch the numbers going up and down. Give yourself a break during your campaign. Get out and walk your dog for a few hours a day to get off the computer, and don’t bring your phone with you. Keep it off at night so you’re not waking up and checking backer numbers. Make sure you stay healthy because you’ll need it for your last week!

**Checklist: During the Campaign**
- Set up livechat or other channel of communication
- If you’re a staff pick, make a badge
- Try to stay sane
Phase 7: Closing the campaign: Final Week

The final week of your campaign is probably going to be the biggest of your campaign month. I'm not really sure why some people hold off until the last few days to start pledging, but there are a few things that help you out this week.

The first is, you’ve got time on your side, in the sense that the urgency to back you now, before it’s too late, will spur people into action. Secondly, people who hit the “remind me” button back a few weeks ago are going to be sent a reminder that your campaign is ending. Finally, in the last few days you get bumped up to the “Ending Soon” part of Kickstarter’s pages so your visibility will increase. Depending on the number of projects in your category, this Ending Soon phase can last many days, or just a couple. I often only look at this section when I go to Kickstarter, because I’m interested in helping people out who are close but not quite at their goal yet.

I haven’t seen an accurate guess of how much more money and backers you’ll bring in during the final week of your campaign versus the week before, but over a four-week campaign, I’d guess it’s 30% first week, 20% middle, and 40% last week. The last two days, in particular, are going to get crazy so be sure to book those off from your day job. If nothing else, the stress of it just might give you a heart attack so be sure you’re not also at work—you’re not going to get any real work done those days, anyway, so you might as well take them off! Another strategy discussed above is to end on the weekend so that if you can’t get time off work you can focus on the final days.

Step One: The Final Countdown Live Stream

You may want to consider offering a live stream for your backers of the final hours of your campaign. Some people host a party at their home or somewhere in their city, and live stream from the party so backers can watch them celebrate—shouting out big backer amounts coming in can be motivating to some backers. I’ve never taken part in a live stream party countdown myself, and didn’t host one because my team was spread out around the country, so it was a bit awkward, but if you’ve got a good venue and your team is local to you and can help you pull it off, it is probably worth attempting this. Plan for two or three hours of your final day to be live streamed and at party central.

Step Two: A Final Messages to Backers on your Page & Redirect

Remember, you can’t change anything on your Kickstarter page after your campaign is over. The last day is an opportunity to update the Kickstarter page with information that will be helpful to people who come to your page too late (after your campaign is over, the page stays up for all eternity, or at least, for now). Is there an option to continue pledging—for “slacker backers”—on your website? Make sure you make that clear and point them to your web page. Remove clutter from the page to keep it simple and slick. Drop in a good-bye thank-you message that helps people
who are too late to know that you still need more funds, but gives a nice touch to your backers for helping you to be successful.

Figure 7.1 A great example of a redirect on the Kickstarter page of the Game Loading site.

**Step Three: Change your Header Graphic?**

Some people change their header graphic during the last week of the campaign to do a daily countdown (“5 days left”, “final days”). I think that this just clutters your graphic, especially if you also have “staff pick” icons on there, and so I didn’t do this, but I think if there are people browsing projects on the Kickstarter page, they may be inclined to check out your project if they know it’s ending very soon, so it may be worth a shot. Frankly, Kickstarter’s own pages already tell people you’re ending soon, so it’s really a toss-up how useful this may be.

I would recommend that if you do try this angle, change it back to your clutter-free graphic in the last hour or so of your campaign. I don’t like seeing “final hours” on a graphic six months after the campaign is over!

**Step Four: Thinking about the Unthinkable: What if my project Fails?**

Let’s face it: Some projects just seem to have some x-factor and get lucky. Some do everything right and still can’t make their goal. Don’t give up hope if your project doesn’t make it. Remember that Kickstarter is as much about creating a community around your project as it is about the fundraising. If you were successful in drawing people into your ideas, that’s just pretty awesome in itself. You also have a few options before you throw in the towel:

1. Switch to another crowdfunding site. Indiegogo is popular because it’s not reliant on you hitting your goal, so you can try to get your backers from Kickstarter to head on over to pledge the same amount on your Indiegogo page that you set up before you shut down your Kickstarter, and roll that right on into an Indiegogo campaign. The benefit to this approach is you
already have a group of people ready to go and a campaign already with momentum, video, graphics, etc. Also, Indiegogo hits a slightly different group of people, so you never know what will happen to move it to that site.

2. Regroup, work on your reputation, and run your campaign again in a year. In the meantime, can you save up some money so your goal is smaller next time? Can you analyze what went wrong, see what you can do to appeal to more people, and run the campaign again? There is nothing to stop you running a campaign on the same project twice. In fact, I’ve seen many people do that and be successful the second time around. They were more prepared for what they needed to do, and the amount of work involved, and so got serious and made it happen the second time.

3. Raise funds through your own website. Try to get backers to back you through your own website. You can offer the same rewards and set up a shop-like front and so they can still get the goods that they wanted, and there’s no deadline and no set goal limit involved. Can you do the project this way? Probably, if you really want to make it happen and can take a bit more time.

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**Checklist: Last week**

- Livestream countdown
- Keep thanking backers
- Remind people who you’ve had contact with that haven’t pledge yet
- Try to stay sane
Phase 8: After the Campaign: Keeping backers updated and filling rewards

So you were successful in your campaign and your project was funded! Congratulations—all that hard work paid off! But now the real work begins. All that reputation and community building you’ve done over the past seven months has paid off, but now it’s time to make sure you continue your momentum and keep all those backers happy!

Step One: Waiting on the Money
It takes about two weeks for Kickstarter to deposit your money into your account, so in the meantime, take a little break—you’ve earned it! Don’t forget to continue to check your account messages and comments, because these won’t quit!

You will have a number of “dropped” pledges: People whose credit cards or other methods of payments failed. On my $61,000 Kickstarter, I had a little over $500 in dropped pledges, so about 1%. That’s quite a lot, but a few people contacted me about their dropped pledges and pledged again through my website.

It doesn’t show on your campaign page how much you actually ended up with after the dropped pledges, only the pledged amount. Nor does it show how much Kickstarter/Amazon’s cut is. Nor does it tell people how much you have to spend to fulfill your rewards for your backers, how much goes to taxes, or the costs that went into producing the campaign. Your friends all think you’re rich, and suddenly, you’ve got more friends than you knew. This is where promising to put a budget up online can pay off, because people can see where the money is going, and that there isn’t anything left over.

You will also get a deluge of spam now: People offering to take your t-shirt orders, people offering to help with fulfillment, and so on. If you’ve been following along with my recommendations, you can just delete all of these, unless you want a fulfillment house to take care of things for you.

Step Two: Have a plan in place for managing Slacker Backers

As described above, your website can be a great place to continue to bring in funding once your campaign has officially ended. However, the downside to this approach is the management of these backers. All of the material provided by Kickstarter (see below) in managing backers is suddenly not available, and you may be getting random amounts through your donate button that you’re not sure who or what it’s for. Remember they may use a family member’s email or username to send
the payment, so things can get really messy really quickly through web pledges unless you’ve set it up really well to manage these people.

If you plan to continue to let people back your project through your website, you need to set it up properly now so that you can manage those people. Build it like an online store, and allow people to make purchases to support you. I personally haven’t done this, however, because I recognize the amount of work involved in fulfilling all of the orders. I want to get my project going, not run an online store!

**Step Three: Considering Fulfillment services**
How much time you want to spend fulfilling orders is up to you. It may be that it’s just a matter of forwarding orders to a fulfillment house for you. But if, like me, you want to make sure that it’s done right and so you’re going to do it yourself, the amount of money you bring in may not be worth the time-suck. Regardless, you need to have a plan on how you’re going to manage the requests even if you decide not to offer slacker-backer rewards or an online store. People still want to give me money, even though I’ve not set it up beyond a “donate” button and the option for sponsors to still come on.

There are so many place out there that will offer to help you with your fulfillment, such as Shipwire (https://www.shipwire.com/w/support/kickstarter-fulfillment-shipping-rewards), or FulfillRite (http://fulfillrite.com/industries/kickstarter-rewards-shipping-fulfillment). For a price, these places can manage your fulfillments on your behalf. I decided to save the money and do it myself. It also means that I can add in a little bonus, send a personal message to a few of the backers, and so on, that I can’t do through a fulfillment service.

Some fulfillment services specialize in just one item, like teeLaunch, which makes and ships t-shirts for you.

Figure 8.1 Teelaunch t-shirt fulfillment site.

**Step Four: Managing backers and rewards: Backer Reports**
It’s a good idea now to show you what Kickstarter offers in the way of fulfillment assistance. Kickstarter provides you with two basic tools to help you with fulfillment: surveys and backer reports.

I had nightmares about spreadsheets before I discovered that Kickstarter takes that step out of your hands for you! At any time, you can export a spreadsheet of all backers at each individual tier level, backers who have filled in your survey or who haven’t filled in your survey, and so on. These change as people fill in your surveys with their information, but essentially you’ll get their address, email, name, and confirmation if their funds went through and how much they pledged.

If you’re handy with your computer, you can automate a system to print from your spreadsheet to address labels, so with just a few clicks you’ve got your addresses all printed out and ready to go at each pledge level.

You can also automate a script to take all of their Twitter handles or names and process them for posting on Twitter or a website with a thank-you. If you’re not all that handy, you can also hire someone to do that for you.

**Backer report**

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**Figure 8.2 The Kickstarter Backer Report page**

**Step Five: Managing Backers and Rewards: Sending out Surveys**

The other tool that Kickstarter provides is a survey. You can construct your own survey to send out to your backers with a series of questions that you need answered. You can either let them type in the answer, or give them a multiple-choice response. For something like t-shirt size, for instance, it makes more sense to provide them with multiple choice. But if you’re customizing something like putting their name on the back of that t-shirt, you need a textbox that they can fill in.
Kickstarter adds the address element to your surveys, which may confuse backers who only get digital rewards. You can add in your description that they can put in a bogus address for you if they want, to protect their privacy. But make sure you get the addresses of people you’re shipping to.

Note that you have the option to allow them to change their address. You don’t want to go printing your address labels until you’re ready to ship, because people move, and if you get the labels done now and then ship a year from now, you may have some angry backers!

Take the time to get the surveys right, because you can only send a survey once. Let’s say you have two items, a t-shirt and a DVD. You want to know what size and colour t-shirt they want, and if they want regular or Blu-Ray DVD. The problem is, however, that you’ve got only one survey to send, so if you are sending the t-shirts out first, and forget to include a question about the DVD, you can’t send that survey again. You can individually message each backer, but what a pain that would be! So get the survey right the first time. Be sure that your questions are well understood – you might even have someone proof read these for you and see if they know what you’re asking, because once the surveys are out, they’re out!

Figure 8.3 Kickstarter backer survey page: note the difference here between a text-based response and multiple choice.

A word of warning: You might think that Kickstarter backers are eager to get their goods, but my experience is that some backers took over a year to fill out their survey, so this might be an albatross that hangs over your head for a while. Keep stock aside for those stragglers and have a plan for them (will you have a cut-off date that you accept them?) I ran into a problem in that people were still trying to download an item after a year, and I was paying a monthly fee to host the item long after I had planned. I think a year is reasonable, but I hadn’t warned them, so feel obligated to keep it open.
Step Six: Keeping Backers Current on the Status of the Shipment

As a backer, there’s nothing more frustrating than being promised that t-shirt in March 2013, and two years later still having nothing. Was it sent? What is the delay about? When you are shipping (and ship on time) let your backers know that you’re sending out the shipments. Keep them informed on progress with some photos of the items coming in boxes or whatnot (Kickstarter says, “backers love seeing photos and videos of their rewards being packaged”). One survey claims that 84% of Kickstarter projects are delayed (http://money.cnn.com/2012/12/18/technology/innovation/kickstarter-ship-delay/index.html). This is a terrible number, easily overcome by significantly overestimating how long you think it will take, and delivering early!

If you are delayed, let them know the reason for the delay and give an estimate to how much extra time you need. I got really annoyed with one person I’d backed who delayed the item by more than two years, and kept giving the same excuse “I underestimated how much time it would take”. Well, really? It doesn’t take two years, and if you can’t handle it, pay someone to take care of it. But the reason I’m most upset is the lack of regular contact insuring that they’re making their best efforts to keep it on track. Remember: your reputation is on the line. Underpromise and overdeliver. Make people happy and make them feel good about backing you. You might decide to do this all over again in the future, and you need those people on your side. Trashing your reputation is not something you want to do, so keep people informed and be reasonable. Saying you “underestimated” the length of time isn’t reasonable because you should have done your homework and figured out exactly how much time it would take, and hired someone to help you if you couldn’t make that deadline.

Information about shipping dates can go out in backer-only updates. The public doesn’t need to read those updates, but don’t overwhelm people with updates or they’ll unsubscribe and be messaging you privately if they’re not getting the information that they need, which can eat up a lot of time!

Step Seven: Keeping Backers up to date on Project Progress

Your backers have investing in your project, and it’s up to you to keep them up to date on their investment. Rather than use the Kickstarter updates for this part of the project, I set up a newsletter sign-up on my website and let backers know that I would only use Kickstarter updates to give updated information on shipping. If they wanted to follow more regular project updates, they could sign up to my newsletter and they’d be kept informed that way.

You can also do public updates or backer-only updates to keep people up to date on progress. Remember that anyone pledging through your website will not get the Kickstarter updates so you’ll have to manage those people separately with any information that gets sent out.
Step Eight: Finishing your Project, Fulfilling all the Rewards

I feel sometimes that my Kickstarter project will never leave me now. It’s been a year and a half since I shipped all my rewards, and I still get backers who never redeemed their codes now trying to redeem it on a page I took down, or other such problems. I had a backer fill in their address over a year after I’d shipped everything out to everyone. I’m still dealing with backers that didn’t check their spam folders for their downloads, and still answering emails from people who for whatever reason didn’t get their item. I’ve got a stack of goods that came back in the mail, either because of some problem in the post or their address. I’ve got countless “lost items” that Canada Post refused to compensate me for (when it comes to international mail, they claim they can’t trace whether it was a problem in Canada or the other country, so it’s “not their problem”. So much for insurance and tracking).

Plan for a contingency of 5% lost/missing items in the post, so you have to add more expenses.

The biggest surprise for me post-shipping was the lack of contact with backers once they had their goods. I guess for most people Kickstarter has become very much a “shopping” rather than “investing in someone’s idea” experience. I had expected some people to write and say whether they liked it or not, or to thank me for the extra goodies I sent to them. It became a bit of a let-down after shipping everything out, so be prepared for that.

But also make sure you take some time to celebrate your fantastic accomplishment! Also understand that you can feel let down when you finish a major project. It’s like your little baby has gone off to university and left you with an empty home. It’s normal to feel a little depressed when you finish a major multi-year project. Take some time to yourself and enjoy a break... before beginning your next project!

Step Nine: Getting Feedback on your Product

If you’ve created a widget and sold that, your product is now in the hands of your customers. Provide some way for them to give you feedback, so you can improve the next batch! They’re your first batch of customers, and may have great ideas or feedback to share with you. Be sure to provide the option to give you that feedback through email, online forms, or post-Kickstarter surveys.

Checklist: After the Campaign

- Provide backers with information about shipping
- Send surveys
- Get stuff ordered and get shipping
- Provide regular updates on shipping and project information
- Get your project built and share your success
**A Final Note**

Finally, I’d like to thank you for reading this book. I know there are other options out there, so thank you for choosing my book. I hope that it’s been helpful to you and that you can learn from both my mistakes and my successes! Please leave a rating on Amazon. I wish you the best of luck in your campaign and your project. Kickstarter is nothing if not an exhilarating, exhausting, exciting ride!

If I’ve left you with the impression that Kickstarter is a lot of work, I’ve done my job. You must do your research. Do your analytics. Iterate on your designs until you’ve got perfection. It is a lot of work. It’s also a lot of fun. Enjoy it, and don’t be too hard on yourself! Good luck!