A Guide To Kickstarter

Hi, I'm Kira!

I'm known as Kiki by my sister, Ani, who is directing Days Of Gray, a modern-day silent film shooting in Iceland this summer, for which we ran a successful $50,000 Kickstarter campaign.

We're so thankful to our *438 backers* who contributed to our goal, and we wanted to give some advice back to all the young filmmakers, artists and creatives out there who want to try their hand at Kickstarter.

First, what's Kickstarter?

In short, Kickstarter is a platform that connects creative people with the rest of the world, and allows people to raise money for their projects.

Great, but will it be good for my project?

Kickstarter is for people who love the Internet.

If you don't already have a Twitter following, several hundred Facebook friends, a website and/or take part in a bunch of online communities (like Vimeo, Instagram, and so on,) Kickstarter is most likely not for you.

> *11% of our funding came through Facebook, 2% from Twitter, and 4% from Days Of Gray's website, another 3% from various blog articles about us. That's 20% of our goal that we wouldn't have gotten without those tools. Thanks misters Zuckerberg, Dorsey et al!*

So: if you have a decent grasp on the Net and are into social networks and the like, go for it!

Why did we choose Kickstarter?

We have a micro budget of about $150,000 (even indie films usually have a budget of at least 3 million!) and a timeframe of barely six months for pre-production and production. But we decided that by hook or by crook, we're going to make this film.

We might also mention that our whole crew is in their twenties (the average age is 23 years old!).

In all of this, our main mountain to climb is finding funds. Movies are expensive endeavors, and sources of funding, while not scarce, are not easy to get (unless you are personally a billionaire, but unfortunately, that's not us yet). The traditional outlets are grants, individuals, corporations and institutions.

But grants have deadlines, and convincing corporations and individuals to give you large sums of money takes a lot of time and effort but sadly doesn't always work out. So we turned to crowd funding.

We didn't blindly rush into a Kickstarter though, and if there is one tip you remember from this guide, let it be this one:

> *A Kickstarter takes time.*
>
> *For a considerably sized Kickstarter (30K and up), you'll need at least one month to prepare, and four to five hours a day to run and manage your campaign.*

What do you need to set up a Kickstarter campaign?

1. First, have a project. Gotta state the obvious. Next, come up with a good title for your Kickstarter and write a simple, clear and concise description. Also have a tweet-able pitch (or two), your typed elevator pitch that can be easily shared all across the Net you so much love!

"A timeless tale of a young boy & girl's otherworldly adventures."
"Days Of Gray: A modern day fantastical silent film, scored by Hjaltalín!"

2. You'll also need to create a killer image for the project, and make an even better video.
   The video is crucial. It's your chance to show the world not only how great your project is, but how wonderful, sincere and interesting you are. Keep it short: ours was 2 minutes long, but only 50% out of the nearly four thousand viewers watched until the end. So keep it around one minute if you can, 90 seconds at most. Be honest, look nice and explain:

   Who you are, what you're up to, what you need money for & why your project will be amazing.

   Your video is basically an audio-visual summary of your whole Kickstarter. You want it to be an introduction that incites viewers to pledge right away! Of course, you also want viewers to read the rest of the page and see how funny you are, what wonderful prizes you have to offer and all that jazz, but people are busy! If you can sell your story in under a minute, you'll be much better off.

3. Set your goal. The best way to estimate how much you could raise is to count the people you know who are likely to donate. Go through your phone and email contacts and tally up an estimate of likely backers, guesstimate that they'll give $25 each, and calculate your possible total. Then drop that total by 15-20%.

   You can always get over-funded, but if you don't reach your goal, you won't get anything.

   Also, don't be fooled by the massive numbers some film and music projects get, if a project is aiming for 100K or more, it's likely there's a team of marketing pros getting paid to run it! We could gripe about it, but then again, it's the high profile gigs that really help get the press and word out about Kickstarter.

   So study their tactics (we looked to Belle and Sebastian's God Help The Girl, The Sisterhood Of Night, and Amanda Palmer's to name a few.) Don't get too envious of all the zeros in their goal, and don't try to shoot for the moon if you don't have a huge following to back you up. Remember, you can always go over!

4. Now, pick your prizes! Make them fun, beautiful, ephemeral, think outside the box and think of things you'd like to have or experience personally. Rewards can be priced anywhere between $1 and $10,000.

   Some interesting facts:

   Projects with rewards under $20 are more likely to succeed than ones that don't offer small rewards.
   Strangely, people are more attracted to certain numbers making $25 more appealing then $20...

   We went for $10, $25, $30, $50, $75, $100, $250, $500 & $1,000, with some bigger prizes that no one chose... but bigger prizes are fun, and who knows, someone might just come along and pledge 1/5 of your goal in one click!

   Don't forget to calculate what the rewards will cost you! Shipping adds up fast, especially for heavier objects and when sending things internationally. Aim to make your prizes digital and experiential if you're looking to keep most of the money you raise.

5. Set your deadline. Running a Kickstarter is stressful and time consuming. 30 days is recommended, but I'd advise a few days longer if you're trying to raise a substantial amount. We barely had any dead time and received pledges every single day of the campaign.
   Keep in mind that the Kickstarter will end at the same time of day you launch it!

6. Set up an Amazon Account. There are a bunch of restrictions so make sure you're eligible! Check Kickstarter's FAQs, and head's up, you cannot set up a Kickstarter from abroad or have someone else set up an account for you! You may make your goal but Kickstarter can keep the money if they feel you've violated their policies.

How do you plan for a Kickstarter?

1. Do your research, there are a lot of great Kickstarter guides out there! Thanks for reading this one, but why don't you go check the "Sources" section below for some other wonderful ones?

   Also, browse Kickstarter! It seems obvious, but look to successful Kickstarters in your field with similar goals and study their wording, updates, prizes and videos for inspiration, and to have an idea of what you're up against!

   > *We had 28 pledges from people who found our project just from browsing Kickstarter, so try to see your project through the eyes of a total stranger flipping through Kickstarter's hundreds of thousands of other projects.*

2. Before you hit the 'launch' button, figure out exactly who you are going to tell about your Kickstarter.

   > *Draft individual, personal emails to everyone you think would like to hear from you.*

   Write to friends, family, colleagues, telling them what you're up to, why you need their support and how they can help. Be sure to have your audience in mind – if you're writing to an older, less tech-savvy crowd, explain what Kickstarter is and how to make an online donation; if you're writing to a broke young friend just out of college, ask them to spread the word by posting the Kickstarter link on Facebook and Twitter! Also, comb through your Facebook friends, LinkedIn contacts, email contacts, phone contacts, business cards you've gathered and make a list of more casual acquaintances that you can message during the campaign.

3. Gather all your media & newsletter organization contacts. Think of any person you know who writes a blog, for a website, magazine or has a radio station who you might be interested in talking about your project, either as its own piece, or in a broader article about film, Kickstarter or your topic.

   Don't hesitate to ride the zeitgeist: we weren't planning on playing the 'women in film' card (oh yeah, only four crew members are men, the rest of us – director, producers, art department, cinematographer and more - are all ladies!) but when reporters asked for our opinion on the lack of female directors at this years Cannes Film Festival, we of course didn't decline to comment.

   Find the contacts for your alumni associations, neighborhood association, religious congregation, and any group or club you've taken part in as well. Write to them about being included in their monthly newsletter, because even if your project isn't national news, it's news to smaller communities you're a part of. By doing this, Days Of Gray got beautiful shout-outs on Icelandic Cinema Online, Air d'Islande and NYU's Gallatin School alumni publication.

4. Plan your online presence. We opened a Twitter account, a Facebook page and a Pinterest especially for Days Of Gray, and started posting about one month before to start gathering a following for the film.

5. Plan your offline events. We got on this a little late, and managed to find wonderful people to lend us a space for a blowout party at the end of our Kickstarter, but we had other events, like screenings, in mind that we didn't get around to planning during the campaign.

   Alright, once you have all that, you're set to go!

How do you run a Kickstarter campaign?

Here's the week-by-week schedule we came up with:

- On day one, send out all those personal emails you drafted. Set up an excel sheet or google doc to keep track of all your backers so you make sure you've thanked everyone! This is especially helpful if there are several people involved in your project.

- In the first week, gather a team of ambassadors. They should be very connected individuals who love you & your project, and will probably pledge early on. Email or call them, invite them to dinner and build your elite corps of amazing people who will help you spread the word through their networks.

  A note on Kickstarter updates: write one when something happens, we ended up with 7 in total, but the number isn't golden at all, just make sure to keep your backers informed, let them know how they can help you spread the word and most importantly, how your project is progressing!

- In the second week, prepare a list of all your networks. Comb through your Facebook friends, LinkedIn connections and twitter followers, and message them directly. You can basically copy/paste your pitch, but the more time and effort you put into personalizing your note to people, the better their responses.

- In the third week, we created a press release to announce our halfway mark and our ongoing fundraising that we sent to publications that might be interested (music, film and Icelandic blogs & publications).

- In the fourth week, we sent out reminders to all the people on our lists who hadn't yet donated. We got on the phone, and really pulled out all stops, even talking to strangers on the street. We were getting a little desperate, we had just barely passed our halfway mark and had about $2,000 to raise – per day. We'd been going at the pretty steady average of $500 to $1,000 per day which, alarmingly, put us pretty far from our 50k goal. Miraculously, we had the amazing surprise of an anonymous angel who promised to double every pledge in the last four days of our campaign. This really saved us, and although at first we wished Anonymous would just put everything in one big chunk, announcing the matching really gave us an enormous boost, and from that point on we raised an average of 6.5k a day!

  If you send your reminders, you can probably expect an 'ending-soon' uptick in pledges, and end up with a nice little hockey stick chart like ours!

Kickstarter's countdown helps too. Then we really freaked out when the "days remaining" wording switched to "hours remaining"! Nothing like knowing you only have 27 hours left to get you going…

- On the night before our Kickstarter deadline, we were still short. We had planned to throw a Kickstart My Heart party to thank all the people who had backed us so far, but then decided to raise what little extra we could by charging a $10 cover that went straight to the Kickstarter (over $1,000 as it turned out!). At 9 pm, we were still thousands short of our goal… But pledges poured in overnight (we have a lot of friends and family in Europe, who start their day at 3 am NYC time) and by the time we cleared out the party in the early hours of the morning, we had made it!

How to wrap up a successful Kickstarter.

Wooo! We made it! Now what?

We'd been thanking people all along, but we had a decent amount of strangers to google. For those who we didn't easily find on the Internet, we simply thanked them through Kickstarter. Sending 438 thank yous of course takes time, but it's by far the best and most rewarding part of running a Kickstarter.

Crunching numbers: you unfortunately don't get to keep all the money raised. Some pledges bounce. People enter the wrong info, their credit cards expire, or they don't have the amount in their accounts at the moment their cards are charged… But Amazon Payments contacts them in case of a failed payment and tries to remedy the situation for a week after your Kickstarter ends, so we only ended up losing $260 to failed pledges.

Kickstarter takes a 5% cut of the money that comes through, and Amazon Payments takes a 2 to 4% transaction fee on each pledge (neither Kickstarter nor Amazon take a cut from the failed payments.)

So you'll likely end up with 90% of your goal in your Amazon Account when all is said and done.

Now, go make your project happen!

If you've enjoyed this here guide, and you find it helpful, please consider giving a little something back. We've made this information free to all under Creative Commons because the more projects succeed, the more wonderful things will be in the world.

And don't hesitate to drop us a line at *info[at]daysofgray[dot]com*. We'd be happy to answer any Kickstarter questions you might have!

Written by

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Sources

Kickstarter Help Center
"Kickstarter tips from a fan of crowd-funding" by Matt Haughey
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