

**KICKING IT:
SUCCESSFUL CROWDFUNDING**

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Sample file

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Introduction

Gatekeepers Versus the Crowd

Call me biased, but I think that creators are some of the most important people in the world. These are the people who bring us new things—art, innovation, ideas. Without them, we'd still be wandering around gathering berries and hunting animals for food. But even then, it was a creator who conceived of and crafted the basket to put those berries in, and the spear used to hunt.

Being a creator in today's society has been notoriously difficult. Until recently, it's been nearly impossible for creators to turn their idea into something tangible and then get it into the hands of the people who wanted it. That's because for everyone who has an idea, there are ten people who want to control that idea in some way. Approve or disprove it. Change it. Spin it for marketing purposes. Reduce its quality to make it more affordable for mass production.

The creator had to go through the proper channels. The writer had to submit his work to a publishing house. The engineer had to propose her idea to a manufacturer. The musician had to get his music picked up by a huge corporation.

If you had an idea—for a book, an invention, a film, a work of art, a game, or anything else—you had to get someone's approval before you could turn that idea into a reality. You couldn't get that idea disseminated. And perhaps more importantly, you couldn't afford the money up-front to produce and ship it. Thus, creators have long relied on manufacturers, editors, producers, studios, galleries, or big corporations to fund and disseminate their creations.

I call this the “gatekeeper” model, because there is someone—usually a single person—who ultimately decides whether your idea is worth producing and sending out into the world. One person decides whether your creation gets into the hands of hundreds, thousands, or even tens of thousands of people. Or none at all.

This method worked well when a single gate was the only means of disseminating your creation. The editor of the car repair magazine made sure that only what he deemed as the best articles on car repair got published. But now, of course, you can go to the Internet and find thousands of articles, blog posts, YouTube videos, or entire websites devoted to car repair. If you’ve read anything at all on the Internet, you know that gatekeepers still provide a valuable service, because how do you know what, of all that information, you can trust? How do you know you’re finding the best information?

Ultimately, then, if you find a gatekeeper you can trust, you get the end product you want and the creators who make the quality products (car repair articles, novels, music, art, new inventions, or anything else) are rewarded. Everyone’s happy.

But... (You knew there was a but coming, right?) What if the gatekeeper is incompetent? What if you can’t find a gatekeeper whose tastes match yours? What if the thing that you want has no gate or gatekeeper at all?

Or, more to the topic at hand, what if you’re a creator, and the jaded, biased, overworked gatekeepers don’t want your creation? Or what if they want to change it, spin it, or repackage it until it’s not your creation anymore? What if you cannot get the gatekeeper’s attention in the first place? Or, perhaps most commonly, what if you just can’t find a gatekeeper willing to take a chance on you?

The real truth is, creators can often produce their own creation faster, more cheaply, more efficiently (and with more love and attention to quality) than some third party. What would just be a drop in the bucket for a large company could be a creator’s livelihood. Some large production house might scoff at your invention, arguing that it will only sell 5,000 units. But for you, selling 5,000 units could pay for

production, shipping, and a bit more, because you don't have their overhead.

Up until recently, creators in this situation had three options: give up their dream; keep trying for a yes from one of the gatekeepers; or apply for a business loan and hope they can find a way to distribute their products.

That's all changed. We stand at the beginning of a new era. Thanks to the Internet, creators can now communicate directly with the end users of whatever they potentially create. And while that has been a wonderful and gratifying "after the fact" sort of situation, now we are seeing creators having the ability to speak with the people who want their creations *even before the creation process has started*.

Now a creator can propose an idea, not to a gatekeeper, but to the actual end users. The end users can say whether they are interested in this new idea or not, expressing their opinion in the most direct way possible: with funding. This funding contributes directly to the creation of the project. It literally enables it. It doesn't go to line the pockets of some middleman, but instead pays for the idea to actually become a reality. It sometimes even pays for the creator to be able to eat and have a roof over her head while she makes it a reality.

It's not surprising, then, that the process is called crowdfunding. Crowdfunding is a boon to both creators and anyone who wants to enjoy their work. It allows direct communication between these two groups by cutting out the gatekeepers. It enables creators to propose products to people that the gatekeepers might very well have said no to. (I have seen this happen many times myself.) It allows the end users to decide for themselves if they want a product or not.

A number of websites have emerged over the last few years to support the idea of crowdfunding, the most popular (although not the first) being [Kickstarter.com](https://www.kickstarter.com). After running a couple of Kickstarter campaigns myself, talking to dozens of other crowdfunding campaign creators, and observing many hundreds of other campaigns, I know that the process can be daunting. It's not easy to do, and it's even harder to do well.