

BOARD GAME KICKSTARTER ADVICE FROM THE BEST IN THE WORLD



GABE BARRETT

— BOARD GAME —

Kickstarter Advice

FROM THE
BEST IN THE WORLD

GABE BARRETT



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Intro

Kickstarter has become one of the most common words in the board gaming vocabulary. Over the last few years, it's established itself as a go-to place for both brand new creators and established companies to fund their projects and get them out into the world.

On a daily basis, people are launching campaigns in hopes of being the next viral success, but it only takes one quick scroll down the "Explore" section to see a ton of projects that honestly have no hopes of actually funding. In spite of the numerous blogs, podcasts, and websites devoted to crowdfunding success, it seems that there is still a good bit of mystery surrounding what all goes into creating a successful campaign.

So, I wanted to create a resource that would be a one-stop-shop for anyone aspiring to fund a campaign in the board game space. And thanks to the help of some of the most successful creators on the planet, I truly believe that this book will be a helpful guide for anyone who reads it. In these pages, you'll learn how to go from zero to funded.

The first section is full of interviews containing lots of nuggets of wisdom from many of the world's best designers and publishers. I asked them all the same questions to get their wisdom and insight on various parts of the Kickstarter process.

Here are the questions I asked:

1. What do you wish you would have known before running a Kickstarter campaign?
2. What makes a game a good product for Kickstarter?
3. What did the marketing plan look like leading up to your most recent campaign's launch?
4. What is the best Kickstarter campaign page (or pages) you've seen and why?

5. What was the biggest mistake you made before, during, or after a campaign, and how did you overcome it?
6. What's your best advice for someone wanting to run a Kickstarter campaign?
7. How do you maintain your health and sanity during a campaign?
8. How do you deal with the mid-campaign slump?
9. What's your best advice for creating campaign updates?
10. What's your best advice for the fulfillment process after the game is manufactured?
11. If you've run multiple campaigns, what did you do differently and why?
12. What would you tell someone who just ran a campaign that failed to fund?
13. Looking to the future, how do you think Kickstarter is going to change? And what can future creators do to adjust?

I felt like these questions hit on pretty much everything I wanted to learn and provided enough depth that I would get very different answers from each different person. And I was blown away by many of the “pro tips” that the creators shared.

After the interviews, you'll find survey data and analysis on a variety of topics. I polled successful Kickstarter creators in one survey and regular Kickstarter backers in another. These chapters will give you an inside look at what both groups are generally doing, and you'll hopefully be able to make decisions for your own campaigns based on the statistical data.

Then, the rest of the book contains all the information I wish I had when I was just getting started. I tried to cover every major topic related to Kickstarter, and when you finish, you'll hopefully have a giant head start for your own projects.

Running a Kickstarter can be an overwhelming idea, but my goal

for this book was to create a tome of knowledge that would make it easier for you to bring your games to life. I really appreciate you taking the time to read it, and I look forward to seeing your campaign live on Kickstarter soon.

Gabe Barrett

Tegucigalpa, Honduras

June 2020

Chapter 1:
Creator Interviews

A.J. Porfirio

Van Ryder Games | vanrydergames.com | @VanRyderGames

18	32,982	\$2,385,730
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Final Girl, Detective: City of Angels, Hostage Negotiator
POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What do you wish you would have known before running a Kickstarter campaign?

I think I did know it, but I don't think a lot of people do, and it's when you Kickstart a game, you are pretty much starting a business. So you better be prepared for everything that comes with that. I think in the early days (we started on Kickstarter back in 2011) you had designers going to Kickstarter because they wanted to bypass traditional publishing. Most of those people aren't publishing anymore because they weren't ready to run a business. So know what you are getting into. It is incredibly fulfilling if you are prepared to put the work in, but it is about so much more than just game design, so you need to be prepared for that.

What is the best Kickstarter campaign page (or pages) you've seen and why?

The best pages are the ones that present things clearly and concisely. I like to think we do a pretty good job of that, but I'd say Roxley Games and Awaken Realms are among the best out there.

What was the biggest mistake you made before, during, or after a campaign, and how did you overcome it?

We accidentally launched a campaign for 60 days of funding that

was supposed to be for 30 days. We canceled it pretty much immediately and rebuilt the entire page within an hour and relaunched. That was pretty crazy and all caused by a clerical error of accidentally choosing the wrong end date and not carefully reviewing everything before officially launching. The lesson? Triple check everything before launching, especially the elements that cannot be changed after launch.

What's your best advice for someone wanting to run a Kickstarter campaign?

Prepare. Prepare. Prepare. Know what you are getting into. Have fun. Prepare for heartache, frustration, joy, and fulfillment. You may experience any or all of those emotions and so much more.

How do you maintain your health and sanity during a campaign?

This gets easier as you get more projects under your belt. I remember in my earlier campaigns I would live (and die) with each pledge (and cancellation), but now I don't sweat the small stuff as much. It is tough to do, but you have to try to keep from getting too emotional or taking things personally.

What's your best advice for the fulfillment process after the game is manufactured?

If you do not know what you are doing, get help. Do not offer what you cannot do or afford. Research and understand the costs beforehand and add 50% to your estimated cost for shipping to protect yourself from hidden costs or ignorance from inexperience.

If you've run multiple campaigns, what did you do differently and why?

We've run many campaigns. Each one is different. We try lots of new things, but my advice here is don't get too cute. It is tempting to want to be different and do things differently than everyone else, but recognize where you might be able to be successful doing

that and where it would be a mistake. There is a reason some things are tried and true. If you try to go against the grain, be prepared that it could fail miserably.

What would you tell someone who just ran a campaign that failed to fund?

I know the common answer here is going to be “Don’t give up! Regroup and relaunch!” and that isn’t bad advice. But also take a hard look at your product and your campaign. Sometimes the problem is exposure and you didn’t do enough to build your audience, or maybe your presentation or your pricing strategy was subpar. Those things can be fixed.

But sometimes the thing you’ve made just might not be that interesting to the market. Really try to take an objective look at your product and answer honestly, “Is this something people want?” If the objective answer is “no” or “not really” then “Regroup and relaunch” is not the right answer. And I know it is hard to shelve an idea you put so much time and effort into, but sometimes that is the best and right decision.

Adam McCrimmon

XYZ Game Labs | xyzgamelabs.com | @xyzgamelabs

3	3,925	\$148,547
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

ArchRavels, Inoka, RobotLab
POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What did the marketing plan look like leading up to your most recent campaign's launch?

Six months of social media hype and convention appearances. Two months of targeted ads and engagement. Ten+ content creators engaged and releasing content around our launch window. Thirty days of comments, updates, engagement, and social media ads.

What is the best Kickstarter campaign page (or pages) you've seen and why?

Parks by Keymaster had a WONDERFUL campaign page. Tone, layout, details - all very well done. And not to be too self-promotional, but I also think we did a very good job with the ArchRavels page, content, and details.

What's your best advice for someone wanting to run a Kickstarter campaign?

You don't have to do it alone and you probably shouldn't. Hire a graphic designer, hire a writer, get a team. I know the funds might be tight, but if you really want to succeed then the best help you can get is other professionals.

How do you deal with the mid-campaign slump?

Advertising/Promotion. If you're going to Kickstarter, you've gotta market your creation. And we kick that mid-campaign slump by ensuring that we have active advertising and promotion running during the middle part of the campaign

What's your best advice for creating campaign updates?

Make them ahead of time. I know that can seem daunting at first, but I promise that once you get on a roll you'll churn 'em out in no time. And if you can't write them ahead of time, at least have them outlined.

What's your best advice for the fulfillment process after the game is manufactured?

Get a fulfillment partner if you are shipping more than one item or more than 200 packages. Yes, it may feel like it will cost you more money. But the risk of getting fulfillment wrong or messing up postage is that your project could go from profitable or break-even to a BIG loss.

If you've run multiple campaigns, what did you do differently and why?

Each campaign we refine our process because we learn a bit more about what we should or shouldn't do, AND the market is always evolving. When you're trying to figure out how to be successful, the best thing you can do is pay attention to other campaigns for products that are like your product and emulate what they do to succeed.

Looking to the future, how do you think Kickstarter is going to change? And what can future creators do to adjust?

A while back, Kickstarter started to shift away from small independent creators hoping to get their project funded to something more akin to a pre-order system. I don't see that side of it slowing down. Having a solid "pre-order like" platform that already has a

lot of consumer trust built in is going to be an important cornerstone of the future board game industry.

However, I do think that we'll start to see the number of small projects just hoping to get by with a \$10k-15k funding goal increase, and that will translate to a robust lower-end market of games out there. With a few of those hitting it big or being picked up by larger publishers.

Alex Hague

Palm Court | @AlxHague

7	23,009	\$848,364
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Wavelength, Monikers
POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What did the marketing plan look like leading up to your most recent campaign's launch?

Launching a Kickstarter is kind of like throwing a party: you send out invites, clean your apartment, buy food and drinks, and then ten minutes before it starts, agonize about whether anyone is going to show up.

And like a party, getting people to show up for a Kickstarter is something you mostly do BEFORE it starts. It may sound strange, but your campaign's success will be determined before you hit the launch button. After it's live, you're just observing the results in some ways.

For Wavelength, we focused on four main areas of outreach:

1. Fans
2. Earned media
3. Forums
4. Ads

Fans: If we're holding to the party analogy, these are your best friends. They love you and will show up in force when you make something new. If you're doing things right, your list will grow and

grow over time and make each subsequent project way more likely to succeed on day one.

Earned media: For Wavelength, we put in a lot of work before the campaign. We brought prototypes to smaller cons like SHUX and BGGCON, ran events, and also just showed it off after hours to anyone who might care. You can't depend on big media outlets to cover you—they very likely won't—so you have to figure out how to get designers and industry folks to say nice things about your game in public! The foundations of that are all done before the campaign begins.

Forums: We always set aside time to hang out on Reddit's r/tabletop and our game page on BoardGameGeek over the course of the campaign. Splashy things like AMAs are good to do, but the drip, drip, drip of small scale interactions over the course of a campaign can really make a huge difference.

Ads: We've dabbled in social media ads for Wavelength and other projects. The results are mixed and not amazing. You may want to try it, but you're competing with absurdly high margin products like internet mattresses. Ads will probably get you a chunk of new backers but won't make a failing campaign succeed or make you a viral sensation. That's still all network effects and word of mouth.

One final thing to add that I think is super important: on day one, we don't hold ANYTHING back. We blast out everything we have: emailing our list, journalists, friends, colleagues, and family. Our strategy has been to full barrel everything at the beginning and hope people show up. It's terrifying, but so far it has worked.

What is the best Kickstarter campaign page (or pages) you've seen and why?

For video: <https://www.kickstarter.com/profile/gerdling/created>

Alan and Sean (Tuesday Knight Games) make the best videos. They give you a great sense of the game's vibe, while also introducing you to the very charming people behind it. Take a look at

the video for World Championship Russian Roulette if you want something to aspire toward.

For persuasiveness: <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/max-temkin/secret-hitler/description>

One of the hardest parts of a Kickstarter is creating the permission structure for someone to back your game without having played it. The solution to this is to have testimonials from trustworthy people with great taste all saying how awesome your game is. Secret Hitler just went ham on this idea: there are a couple dozen testimonials scattered across the campaign, filled with super credible reviewers, designers, and influencers. If you can even get 25% of this in place before you launch, my guess is that you're almost guaranteed to fund at a high level.

For images/GIFs: <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/ant-sylabs/figet-cube-a-vinyl-desk-toy>

Tabletop games on Kickstarter are pretty bad at showing off the tactility of their designs. Take a look at the Technology category to see how to create incredible product photos and GIFs of people interacting with products, instead of boring 3D renders of components.

For community: <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/elanlee/throw-throw-burrito/>

I personally find a lot of the aggressive growth hacking that some creators do kind of gross. Like, please don't make me share something on social media to unlock stretch goals, thank you very much. BUT there are some creators, like the Exploding Kittens folks, who have turned this into a joyous art form, and I'm incredibly jealous of them. Each campaign is a game in itself.

For gameplay: <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/alxhague/wavelength>

If you'll forgive me for citing my own projects, I think we do a really great job creating simple, compelling videos that show the

core fun of a game. The best part is that you can do this in a super lo-fi way: we don't use fancy camera equipment and definitely don't hire anyone to make them.

What's your best advice for the fulfillment process after the game is manufactured?

Your first few campaigns should be ruthlessly focused on two things:

1. Creating the best game possible.
2. Getting people to care about it.

Anything else is nearly always a waste of time. Even worse, it feels like you're being productive, but you aren't focused on the right things.

So leave as many logistical challenges as possible to the pros and find partners who can hold your hand as much as possible. For fulfillment, that means a company who can handle things like customs, VAT, returns, and such. When you're talking to them, just let them know that they're going to have to baby you a little. They're probably used to it and have those considerations built into their fee structures already!

There are lots of great partners out there. We've used Blackbox for fulfillment for years and love them. And our manufacturer, Strom Mfg, is also super supportive on the logistics side of getting games from the factory to fulfillment centers.

What would you tell someone who just ran a campaign that failed to fund?

Feel bad for yourself for a little bit! It's totally OK!

Once you have some emotional distance, do some soul searching about what went wrong: either the game itself wasn't interesting enough, you didn't figure out how to talk about it in a compelling way, or you didn't do enough work to get people to the page.

Be brutally honest with yourself. It feels bad to acknowledge

that people aren't interested in your game, but every designer has this happen, and if that's the case, it's better to learn that lesson and start a new one.

But also remember that Kickstarter isn't a pure meritocracy. Some brilliant ideas fail to fund, and even more underfund. The videogame *Hollow Knight* is a complete work of genius and a huge critical success, but only raised around \$38,000! And take a look at these brilliant measuring cups:

<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/welcomeindustries/measure-visual-measuring-cups>

They failed to fund and now they're in the MoMA design store!

Andrew Russell Birkett

Atheris Entertainment | atherisentertainment.com | @AtherisGames

4

SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS

2,045

TOTAL BACKERS

\$71,294

TOTAL FUNDING

Ruins of Mars, Supernatural Socks, Mutant Crops

POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What do you wish you would have known before running a Kickstarter campaign?

I wish I knew how critical it is to do pre-campaign marketing. I didn't market my first game nearly as well as I could and would now, which may have hurt that campaign's success, and could have snowballed into more recurring customers for our current games.

What did the marketing plan look like leading up to your most recent campaign's launch?

Creating a marketing plan is tough. It is obviously much more detailed for larger campaigns than for campaigns that require less capital.

A marketing plan should include both unpaid and paid avenues.

Unpaid promotional elements include being an active presence in the community in which you're in, product demos (at game stores and/or conventions), public relations, and social media outreach. Paid channels include preview videos in which the previewer brings their audience to your campaign page, online advertising efforts such as Facebook advertisements or Board Game Geek advertisements, and game giveaways.

The best marketing plan garners interest well before the page

goes live and targets the same individuals several times. Generating an email list and excitement for the game prior to launch is critical.

What was the biggest mistake you made before, during, or after a campaign, and how did you overcome it?

Like so many other creators, my largest mistake was miscalculating shipping prices. I undercharged for shipping for my first game, Cul-De-Sac Conquest, which was a hard hit to the bottom line. However, it was a great learning experience and one I tried to take in stride.

What's your best advice for someone wanting to run a Kickstarter campaign?

Kickstarter campaigns are a lot of work. Don't start one without really doing some soul searching. For creators who want to start businesses and see their products made, the platform can be a tremendously valuable resource. Although, some designers might find they have less time to design or participate in other creative processes where their main interest lies.

How do you maintain your health and sanity during a campaign?

Kickstarter campaigns are not for the faint of heart. They're incredibly stressful. While running a campaign I try my best to establish breaks when I'm not refreshing the campaign page constantly. I also try my best to not agonize over watching the campaign funding, but alas I always fail at this mission.

Spending time with family and friends as well as doing the things that make you happiest is a great way to keep your sanity despite the stress. For me I prefer running, mindlessly watching TV, reading, and playing board games. Also, eating healthy and sleeping adequately can create vast changes in your attitude and behaviors, so maybe try to cut back on the coffee and sleepless nights.

How do you deal with the mid-campaign slump?

Having shorter campaign durations is a great way to fight the mid-campaign slump. Additionally, doing game store demos and attending conventions to show off the game with new players is a great way to combat the mid-campaign slump as well. Though, unfortunately, it is likely not possible to completely eliminate the slump. It's just part of the process.

What's your best advice for the fulfillment process after the game is manufactured?

Fulfillment is a lot of work. Some creators insist on doing this themselves, and others use companies like Quartermaster Logistics. No matter what option a creator takes, it is imperative to put yourself in your customers' shoes. When you receive complaints, customer service requests, etc., how you handle yourself and your brand will determine whether you get word-of-mouth advertising or lose a customer. It's important to understand how these communications are handled as well as to do what's fair for the customer. Treat them as if they helped you develop a product that you're passionate about and which would not have been possible without them - they did.

If you've run multiple campaigns, what did you do differently and why?

Each campaign I do something slightly different. Oftentimes it is to stay up-to-date with the constantly evolving platform, but other times it is to test something that may or may not have been done before. As competition increases, it's important to test new ideas and challenge existing notions. For Ruins of Mars, I began focusing more on social goals than monetary stretch goals. Social goals encourage and allow backers to be creative and be a part of the campaign in ways that stretch goals do not.

Skybound Games is now working on a system in which their goals are tied more into creating a community and furthering the

reach of the game in terms of backer count than on a strictly monetary figure. I believe this will be the way stretch goals of the future are handled and am excited to embrace this change.

Looking to the future, how do you think Kickstarter is going to change? And what can future creators do to adjust?

I think Kickstarter will continue to become increasingly more competitive and thereby improve the quality and offerings of products listed on the platform. With increased competition, new creators will need to create a product offering that stands out from the crowd and possibly even work with a more established creator to utilize their reach and customer base to help move the project forward.

Aron West

Elzra Games | elzra.com | @ElzraGames

5

SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS

8,428

TOTAL BACKERS

\$951,568

TOTAL FUNDING

Catacombs, Catacombs Cubes

POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What do you wish you would have known before running a Kickstarter campaign?

Ignore what Kickstarter promotes about bringing creative projects to life. That's simply nonsense. For tabletop games, the Kickstarter platform is for taking pre-orders. Period.

The days of a project being built around concept sketches are long gone. A tabletop game must be complete and playtested before a campaign is launched.

Kickstarter does not prevent well-capitalized companies from using their platform, so a project from a first-time creator will directly compete with these well-capitalized (in some cases publicly traded) companies. They will typically already have a base of fans on Kickstarter and will be able to outspend smaller teams on campaign advertising, product licenses, access to influencers, among other significant advantages.

Some companies using Kickstarter are start-ups that are receiving funding from programs in their home countries. It's not a level playing field in the slightest and these larger and/or well-funded companies contribute to a "rich get richer" effect on the platform.

Backers are now extremely well educated and spoiled for choice.

If they don't like a campaign, they can easily pull their support and transfer their support to the campaign next door. This freedom of choice and intensely competitive marketplace means that companies must invest thousands of dollars into their campaigns before they even launch. A campaign must include high-quality artwork, project videos, prototypes, review videos from influencers, a complete set of rules, and playthrough videos.

Also, funds raised on Kickstarter are not “free money” from the Internet. A successfully funded project represents a serious commitment to execute to the best of one's ability. It's a process that's not for the faint of heart.

What was the biggest mistake you made before, during, or after a campaign, and how did you overcome it?

Two big mistakes: not choosing the right manufacturing partner and underestimating fulfillment costs. Both of these mistakes can easily put a company out of business.

We used a broker to handle production for one of our projects. They came with high recommendations from numerous colleagues in the industry. A broker is based in country A (for example the US) and acts as a liaison to the factory based in country B (usually China). The broker is responsible for collecting the project's specifications, communicating these specifications to the factory, and oversees the production process including quality assurance. When the broker fails in any of these activities, then costly delays and headaches will result.

Furthermore, remediation work, such as replacing a defective component at a local packaging plant and applying fresh shrink-wrap, may be required. We lived through this nightmare scenario involving warped game boards. A broker will typically offer assurances during the pre-sales period about having worked with a given factory for several years. However, a broker can be powerless if the factory decides that their relationship with the broker is not worth saving and refuses to cooperate.

Regarding fulfillment costs, always, always add a buffer in the fulfillment budget. There are many costs, some unexpected: pick fees, packaging fees, processing fees (if a product doesn't have a bar code, for example), container receiving fees, account management fees, storage fees, volumetric fees. The fulfillment center can sometimes raise several invoices and expect payment before they will do anything, let alone shipping packages.

Invoices can be raised in a fulfillment center's local currency which can raise foreign exchange risks. We suffered through a twenty percent drop in our national currency during the production phase of one of our campaigns, so this is a very real risk.

Sending a package to certain regions will result in significantly higher shipping prices, even when sent domestically from inside that country. Always consider carefully the cost of shipping a package to any of these regions: Norway, Switzerland, Israel, Ukraine, Guernsey, Reunion, Hawaii, Alaska, Puerto Rico, US overseas territories, rural addresses in Canada including Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Australian addresses in Western Australia, Tasmania, and the Northern Territory. Flag these addresses when preparing shipping lists for the fulfillment centers.

How do you deal with the mid-campaign slump?

It's important not to fight the slump by promising more. It can be tempting to give away something extra. However, almost every decision has an effect on the project's budget. It may not sound like much to offer an extra component; however, that component will have to be designed, tested, and fulfilled. It's surprising how often something which sounds simple on paper can contribute to production delays.

Another temptation is to increase spending on advertising the campaign, especially when offers claiming to magically increase funding from third party actors and influencers start appearing in the project's inbox. Be skeptical about these offers. Chances are good that a national news outlet is not going to be interested in your

Kickstarter board game project. Kicktraq.com and BoardGameGeek.com are good choices for advertising a Kickstarter campaign. Avoid most of the rest.

What's your best advice for the fulfillment process after the game is manufactured?

Fulfillment must be considered before a tabletop game is even manufactured! Fulfillment informs the dimensions of the product's box and influences how any auxiliary add-ons will be handled. The size of the game's box with any "add-ons" can have serious implications for transportation costs. They also influence how fulfillment partners will pack and ship the packages to the end customer.

Where possible, ship a full ocean container (FCL) from a factory to a fulfillment center, but the savings on shipping a 20' container versus a 40' container are not as significant as one might think. Time of year can have a significant effect on the price one will pay for ocean container shipping. Preparations for Christmas in North America, for example, can precipitate price spikes in the late summer, early autumn. The Lunar New Year period in China can also affect if a product can be transported at all, as factories and transportation companies shut down during this critical public holiday.

A factory's quotation may be "freight on board" (FOB) or "ex works" (EXW) where goods are transported only to the factory's warehouse door for collection. In the case of a FOB quotation, the finished products will be transported to the port ready to be loaded onto an ocean container. In the case of an ex-works quotation, the shipper is responsible for transporting the products to a suitable port for loading.

Consider these two options carefully as an "ex works" quotation for a factory located inland from the coast can increase transportation costs when a truck has to drive the product to the port. It can also strand the product during the Lunar New Year, as no truck drivers are available. Always add some extra copies of each SKU to a container shipment to account for potential shipping damage.

Check the packing lists that a factory issues for each container carefully and ensure that an accurate commercial invoice is ready for customs clearance. If a new company (first-time importer) ships a container across a border, expect a secondary customs screening. This can add delays to the fulfillment process and will certainly cost extra. Budget for at least a couple thousand dollars for a secondary screening of a full 40' container.

When shipping products to end customers, it's important to understand that most carriers (UPS, DHL, FedEx, etc) now consider both a shipping box's volume ("volumetric weight") and its actual weight. A carrier will charge whichever of these two prices is higher. It's almost guaranteed that customers will not understand this distinction, so explanations regarding shipping on the project's campaign page must reflect this.

Most fulfillment centers will offer different shipping services. In most cases, choose their tracked economy service. This usually involves transporting the package by truck or by sea (surface shipment).

As most Kickstarter backers are used to waiting, express shipping options are a misuse of campaign funds. It's best to carefully vet your fulfillment partners and meet them in person, if possible. Most of them send representatives to conventions such as Gen Con.

It's tempting to skimp on packaging (boxes) and void fill (such as peanuts, kraft paper, bubble wrap). Don't do this. Consider using premium, double-walled boxes and suitable void fill, especially to protect corners.

Where possible, all items to be fulfilled must have a unique SKU (stock keeping unit) and a bar code. It is a best practice to limit the number of possible SKU combinations. When a large number of SKU combinations is unavoidable (perhaps an existing product is being offered as part of a campaign), then prepare for this carefully and make sure the fulfillment center understands what they are to do.

Board Game Kickstarter Advice

Ensure that costs to transport products from the factory to the fulfillment centers are built into the project's fulfillment budget. Most fulfillment centers want shipments to be sent DPP (delivered, duty paid), so duties and taxes must be carefully considered when shipping products over most international borders.

Some fulfillment centers want their invoice prepaid, so prepare for this requirement to avoid fulfillment delays. Finally, it is mandatory to have a sales tax strategy. Kickstarter is a store (despite their marketing to the contrary), physical goods are being sold, and governments want their cut. Plan for this.

Behrooz 'Bez' Shahriari

Stuff by Bez | stuffbybez.com | [@stuffByBez](https://twitter.com/stuffByBez)

8

SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS

1,238

TOTAL BACKERS

\$19,850

TOTAL FUNDING

Wibbell++ , Kitty Cataclysm

POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What was the biggest mistake you made before, during, or after a campaign, and how did you overcome it?

I launched my first ever campaign and told virtually no one about it. I thought that folks would just find it.

Some people did, but it wasn't until the last twenty hours (when I really started messaging all my Facebook friends and asking them to chip in a little) that it was realistically going to fund.

Now, in 2020 I'm planning three Kickstarters, and I'm not going to message friends about all of them. That would be too much. But I'm certainly a tad less shy about sharing what I'm doing.

What's your best advice for someone wanting to run a Kickstarter campaign?

You can spend time and/or money. I think that a bit of money spent judiciously will always help grow the campaign, but you can do without much at all. Conversely, you always need time.

So, basically, be aware that Kickstarter is a time investment.

Secondly, you need to have something that is genuinely different from the other stuff that your backers will have already seen. Maybe you can get away with something a bit derivative if you're

doing great marketing to grow the audience outside the typical Kickstarter bubble. Otherwise, your first step should ideally be to make sure that your project is for something genuinely new.

What's your best advice for creating campaign updates?

Write stuff ahead of time.

People are interested in the mundane. What is “normal” for a game creator will not necessarily be known to a backer and might be a cool peek behind the scenes.

Folks enjoy getting to make real decisions. I think this is part of the appeal of the recent “choose the next stretch goal” trend, but this can be used even more by allowing backers to give suggestions or choose between different art sketches, box layouts, character names, or other details that could genuinely go either way.

If you're an individual, let backers know a little bit about how you're feeling and how the campaign fits into your life. What does it mean for you?

Write development diaries.

Look at one card in detail and talk about the history, the art, or the strategic possibilities.

If you're not sure whether to make an update or not, make one.

What's your best advice for the fulfillment process after the game is manufactured?

I get everything shipped to my home, then post everything out. I use the opportunity to spend a bit of time on things - quickly doodling animal pictures, self-portraits, and positive messages onto every envelope. I try to make the personal touch carry through until people get their things.

On the downside, this means that it takes a LOT more time than it should.

So my real advice is to absolutely go crazy and do stuff yourself if you want, but be aware that it is very time and labour-intensive.

If you've run multiple campaigns, what did you do differently and why?

Look, there is a set of “best practices,” and there’s also a real sense of “this is what I have the energy to do.”

Since my first campaign, I've never launched a game campaign without at least one review.

Ideally, I'd have more reviews. Ideally, I'd have everything lined up three months beforehand and then wait to get more feedback and tell people about it a few times. But sometimes you run out of stock and need finances to fund a new edition.

And, honestly, though I know that having final art before a Kick-starter would be the better business decision, I far prefer the idea of having it be a collaboration between me and the backers.

I always focus on the mechanics first, and my playtesting process has probably continued to lengthen as I have the privilege of being able to show off stuff at conventions and find an increasing number of people interested in trying out my games.

Maybe my expectations are more realistic now. When I first pressed the button to launch, I half-worried, “What if TOO MANY people find this and I can't do all the fulfillment myself? It's such a brilliant game!” Now, it was good to plan for a crazy-success, but I now realise the minimal chance of that happening. If I want to have a bigger success, it's all about the marketing really.

But, for better or worse, my approach hasn't changed massively.

What would you tell someone who just ran a campaign that failed to fund?

You are worth more than any single thing you do. You are the combination and sum total of your past, present, and future. Relationships, writings, each interaction...

There's this all-consuming feeling when you do a Kickstarter -- as if this is the only thing that matters in your life.

Board Game Kickstarter Advice

If you want to be a game designer or self-publisher, then that is more than any single project. And you are more than your designs/publications.

Whether you should relaunch or not is up to you. Maybe the market doesn't really want your game. Maybe it's better to focus on other stuff. Or maybe you were unlucky or the project was badly managed. That all depends on the details.

But step one is always to regroup and make sure that you are feeling emotionally and mentally OK.

Brenna Noonan

brennanoonan.com | @brennanoonan

22	54,696	\$3,401,242
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Everdell, Nemo's War 2nd Edition, Alien Frontiers:
Definitive Edition

POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What did the marketing plan look like leading up to your most recent campaign's launch?

The first things I'll start with are creating prototypes and booking preview videos, as this process typically needs the most lead time - several months, in some cases. If I want any 3D work done, I'll also book and send the assets for that. While that's underway I'll start writing the copy, creating the page graphics, and experimenting with layout.

Ideally, I'll start heavy promotion about three months before the campaign launches with organic outreach, content reveals, email newsletters, and paid advertising. This will all progressively ramp up in the weeks leading up to the campaign. The goal at launch is to have a deluge of content and coverage to drive people to the campaign in the crucial first 48 hours.

How do you maintain your health and sanity during a campaign?

Self-care during a campaign is really important. it can be really taxing to make yourself available to so many people all the time. Set a schedule for yourself for when you'll be answering messages and comments and updating the page, let the backers know about your schedule, and stick to it.

I remember when I first started running campaigns I'd wake up in the middle of the night to answer comments; don't do that yourself! It's OK to set some boundaries and enforce them, and for the most part, backers will understand and respect that schedule.

How do you deal with the mid-campaign slump?

I'm a big proponent of shorter campaigns - I would never run a 30-day campaign. The slump is too large, and the chance of backer falloff is too high. So many more projects will launch during a 30-day campaign that could divert backers away from mine. So I prefer to keep a tight timeline to limit the chance of that happening. I'll also time content drops like videos to hit during the middle of a campaign to re-invigorate backers and bring new ones in.

What's your best advice for the fulfillment process after the game is manufactured?

Choose a really, really good partner. You're going to be working closely with them for months, so you want to make sure you're connected with someone you can trust. Talk to everyone you know who has fulfilled a Kickstarter campaign and ask them who they used and what their experiences were.

If you're evaluating a fulfillment partner, check past campaigns that they fulfilled. Did fulfillment go smoothly, or were there a lot of delays? Were a lot of backers unhappy with the shipping process? Are there lots of photos of damaged products?

If you're at the point where you're getting quotes, be thorough, and always ask for a range of options. Maybe your product can go in a bubble mailer instead of the box they originally quoted you! This can also serve as an initial evaluation period. If the fulfillment provide isn't being responsive during the quoting process, that would be a red flag that they may not be reliable down the road when things are even busier.

Communication, both in terms of timeliness and clarity, is very important to me personally in a fulfillment partner. Coordinating

fulfillment is a complex process so whoever can distill the vital information down quickly and simply will get extra points from me.

If you've run multiple campaigns, what did you do differently and why?

One big change I made was for the Everdell: Spirecrest & Bell-faire campaign, which I ran without stretch goals. I had been observing some backer fatigue with regards to stretch goals, how they felt beholden to check in with the campaign each day, and the anxiety that went along with them. Plus, these were higher price point products anyway, so I wanted to present them as fully upgraded from the start to make sure backers could see the full value.

I like experimenting with Kickstarter formats too, so I'd be lying if I said I wasn't excited by the challenge to do a big campaign without stretch goals. We finished just under \$1M, so it worked out alright!

Caezar Al-Jassar

Alley Cat Games | alleycatgames.com | @alleycatgames

11	18,491	\$678,023
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Dice Hospital, Welcome to Dino World, Tinderblox & Kittin

POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What makes a game a good product for Kickstarter?

The game is unique. The price point is excellent. You give exclusive content for backing. It has excellent artwork and graphic design. The game itself is fun for the demographic you are targeting. And the Kickstarter page is well laid out and communicates the above points clearly.

What did the marketing plan look like leading up to your most recent campaign's launch?

We took advantage of Kickstarter's new pre-launch page feature. While it is still too early to gauge how successful it was, it seemed to have garnered a good amount of interest.

We also sent copies of our game to reviewers we haven't typically sent games to before, mainly because their audiences were (we felt) more casual.

What is the best Kickstarter campaign page (or pages) you've seen and why?

Anything by the Oatmeal. Their pages are hilarious, fun, engaging, colourful, bold, concise, and clear.

What was the biggest mistake you made before, during, or after a campaign, and how did you overcome it?

One of our Kickstarter campaigns fell well short of our expectations given the amount of time we spent developing it and how much we spent on the artwork. A similar product came out a few months before, and that didn't help either.

We put that down as experience and realised that sometimes you are going to be hit by other products that come out at the same time. Regarding the time developing it, we now outsource the “early development” of a game if we truly believe in it so that the fundamental cogs of Alley Cat Games continue and not grind to a halt. We had a similar issue with Dice Hospital Community Care after the campaign ended where we vastly underestimated the internal development time needed to complete what we thought was a few “loose ends.” In the future and related to the previous project, we will only be signing games that require very minimal internal development.

What's your best advice for someone wanting to run a Kickstarter campaign?

Make sure you understand your game as a product. Why does it deserve to be on someone's shelf? Just because you like it, or think it is good, doesn't mean it actually is.

Once you've got this nailed, you need to make sure that you communicate this effectively. Just like how most designers cannot write effective rulebooks for their games, creators have a similar issue effectively communicating why their game is good. Art and graphic design helps as it shows a commitment from the creator that they've spent money on it, as they believe in the game, but that is not enough.

The Kickstarter campaign itself has to show the best parts of the game: a unique mechanism, great art, an established designer, GIFs, excellent price point, exclusives/incentives to back now and not wait for retail, and so forth. Communicate this poorly, either

by being too wordy or not using language your target demographic resonates with, and the game might as well be thrown into the depths of the deepest, darkest dungeon.

How do you maintain your health and sanity during a campaign?

Having seen the full ups and downs of multiple Kickstarters, this is a very apt question.

We specifically choose not to work evenings and weekends on days which are not the first few days and last few days of the campaign.

We also make sure that backers are aware of this through comments, and on the Kickstarter page itself and explain that although we love the hobby, we need to look after ourselves and our families.

We also have a policy of not responding to comments which are meant as disparaging or excessively demanding in a derogatory way.

How do you deal with the mid-campaign slump?

We typically get backers engaged by asking questions about slight changes to the game content. Like do you want card A or card B?

We also blind reveal stretch goals for most of our campaigns.

Finally, as the slump makes everything go quiet, we use the time to test ads.

What's your best advice for the fulfillment process after the game is manufactured?

Don't underestimate the side costs involved. There are a ton of fees that new creators may not be aware of such as:

- Transport to port (EXW vs FOB)
- Import fees
- Brokerage fees
- Internal country transport fees

- VAT
- Import taxes

Do your due diligence on fulfillment companies. We made a mistake by using a fulfillment company that was woefully ill-prepared and highly unprofessional. Budget in for these things, and use a professional fulfillment company. You get what you pay for.

What would you tell someone who just ran a campaign that failed to fund?

Go back to basics. There are multiple things to look at.

Firstly, is it your game? Kickstarter is product-led. If you can't get across the uniqueness, fun, or quality of the game, that in itself leads to failure. Within this caveat, art and (often hugely under-appreciated) graphic design are key. The two go hand in hand, and you cannot have one aspect look better than the other.

Secondly, price point. It's all well and good creating a fantastic game, but if the product itself is a cute themed cooperative game with tons of miniatures and costs \$100, you've massively missed the mark.

At Alley Cat Games we work backward. From the moment the game is pitched to us, we calculate how much the game will cost to manufacture and ultimately how much it will then cost the consumer. That final price point is key because if the consumer is not interested in the game/product because of the price point then the project is dead in the water.

Other questions to ask yourself are: Have you built a big enough audience? Have you highlighted your game to the right audience? Are you creating games for similar audiences?

Looking to the future, how do you think Kickstarter is going to change? And what can future creators do to adjust?

We hear a lot about the "Kickstarter bubble." While there has been no obvious "bursting of the bubble," we've seen attitudes and pur-

chasing habits change drastically in the past two years. Backers are becoming increasingly more selective over their purchases. Shelf space is becoming an increasing problem for backers too, which is part of the problem.

Backers also know that your games (especially established indies like ourselves) will more than likely hit retail stores, so you need to give them incentives to back the Kickstarter.

We predict that small, casual games with basic components will struggle to fund, and bigger campaigns/products with unique angles will continue to sell reasonably well. However, games are a luxury good, so anything can happen in the future.

Carla Kopp

Weird Giraffe Games | weirdgiraffegames.com | @WeirdGiraffes

6	6,856	\$202,815
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Fire in the Library, Tumble Town, Dreams of Tomorrow
POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What's your best advice for someone wanting to run a Kickstarter campaign?

Don't launch before you're completely ready, and don't be afraid to push off the launch date. The first few days matter so much that it can be the difference between having a campaign struggle the entire time and barely fund and funding in the first week and reaching several stretch goals.

No one is going to care that you're not hitting your initial date, and you can save a lot of money by not having to launch again at a different time. Not that having to relaunch is the worst, but it's a much better use of your time and effort to fund the first time you launch.

How do you maintain your health and sanity during a campaign?

I make sure to take regular exercise breaks during a campaign. Being able to go outside and see the sun is also really important and can be a good way to recharge. I also focus on the lead measures vs the lag measures.

Lead measures are things like how often I post about the Kickstarter, how many people I reach out to, etc. Lag measures are things like the backer count, the amount of money raised. etc.

While the lag measures are important, they're also not something you can directly effect which can be disheartening.

If you focus on being proud of yourself about the things you can control, your mental state will be a lot better off.

How do you deal with the mid-campaign slump?

I always try to get reviewer copies of the game out in enough time so that the copies can be sent to another set of reviewers and there can be new reviews posted during the middle of the campaign. Communicating frequently with reviewers will hopefully mean you can get the reviewer copies sent as soon as you can and get the most reviews out during the campaign.

I do a number of interviews before and during the campaign so that interviews are almost constantly coming out during the Kickstarter. And I try to travel a bit during the Kickstarter to get new people to know about the game. I also get great content to post on social media by doing this, which helps keep people excited about the Kickstarter's progress.

What's your best advice for creating campaign updates?

When creating campaign updates, always make sure to be honest and realistic. I always give estimates for when things will happen but I also mention when things are not fully in my control. In my experience, being transparent has meant that backers haven't gotten angry about delays, as they understood why they happened and knew about the errors as soon as they occurred.

If you've run multiple campaigns, what did you do differently and why?

I try and learn from every campaign and expand my network. For instance, I'll keep working with the reviewers that gained the most backers to the project or were the easiest to work with, and I'll add new reviewers as well. I'll do interviews with the people I've talked to before and add a few more interviews into the mix as

well. I've also been trying to meet different communities around the country by going to different conventions so, each Kickstarter, more people know who I am and what my games are.

What would you tell someone who just ran a campaign that failed to fund?

Look back and really analyze why your campaign failed. You can take a few months and relaunch your campaign and maybe fund, but it might be a better idea to work on a different project and to really make that shine, then to return to your failed project.

Learn what you can, and don't feel like you have to work on a project just because you've put in so much effort so far. Be honest with yourself as not every game needs to be a product, and you haven't really failed if you've learned from what you've experienced.

Chad Elkins

25th Century Games | 25thcenturygames.com | @25thCG

6	5,152	\$164,267
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Kingswood, Space Explorers, Jurassic Parts
POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What makes a game a good product for Kickstarter?

Any game can be a good product for Kickstarter, but some are better suited for the Kickstarter audience. There are exceptions to this of course, and you'll always be able to point to an example of a game that caught fire and bucked the trends. It's widely stated that party games and lighter family games will often struggle more to create the same explosion of backers that a "box full of plastic" miniatures loaded campaign will create.

With so many Kickstarter creators now being more established with customers, this can push a lot of folks to simply wait for retail on titles that don't create a strong sense of urgency around why you should back the project. The new trend for creators who do have a retail presence is to shift toward creating an alternate deluxe version of a game that will not go into retail distribution, while also offering a cheaper less fancy component edition that will be the version in retail stores later.

This allows those looking for just the base cheaper experience to have a choice on whether to back now or wait for retail. The method simultaneously creates a FOMO (fear of missing out) for those who want that version others will not have access to down the road.

The FOMO with Kickstarter can be a very powerful thing. This alternate deluxe version helps with that, especially for products that don't have a lot of miniatures to keep dripping into the game as Kickstarter/promo exclusive stretch goals. Either way, you can use these techniques to help you drive up your backer and pledge totals. Very light family or party games often don't have enough flexibility, nor would the market even support, to offer a deluxe version and certainly don't have an army of minis to inject into a campaign to keep up the FOMO hype.

What is the best Kickstarter campaign page (or pages) you've seen and why?

Any page that clearly articulates what I'm looking at, why I should care, what I will receive, and what others think about it. There are so many great looking pages out there; it doesn't take a lot of research to start to identify consistency from the campaigns that do it well. Go out and browse popular campaigns and others you've personally backed. One of the best ways to learn about Kickstarter is to watch others in action, that's why backing a lot of projects before you run your own is so critical.

There are too many pages to specifically mention, so let's instead focus on a few key elements to a well-crafted page that, for the most part, are universal. Let's start with your campaign video. Keep it short and concise. Anything over two minutes is going to drastically start hemorrhaging viewers. I prefer videos that set up the theme and still cover a brief overview of what you are doing in the game. You can look at my past campaigns and see this approach, all in under two minutes.

The videos that go solely on theme might lose someone who wants to learn how the game plays. Those that go too long on game explanation will make someone lose interest, as longer gameplay videos and even full playthroughs can be placed on the page itself. Find that balance.

Your primary Kickstarter image, the one folks will see when they browse the search results and will see as a preview when shared on social is critical to get right. If that image is too crowded, busy, or doesn't properly relay the game, you may never even get a chance to wow someone with what is on your page. This is your only chance to make a first impression, so make it count.

The page should be concise in that I can scroll through and quickly see what the game is about, basic demographics (player count, time, etc), and what is in the box. All of those should be heavily visual with some minor text in between. Please do not use a wall of text on your page.

I generally place the how to play section after the what's in the box section. Use visuals and animated GIFs with brief explanations to walk people through what they will be doing in the game. Supplement that with how to play videos, full playthroughs, and a link to your rules. If you aren't skilled at creating those videos, then find a content creator to help you with it.

Some will argue that you need to place the how to plays above what is in the box as you want to hook them before you show them the components. If the components don't look interesting or what I get looks sparse compared to the price, it really won't matter how it plays. Usually how to play areas are longer than your what's in the box, so again let's go back to the few scrolls approach and get the most important info at the top.

After the how to play, you should include links to your reviewer videos, articles, etc., as well as a section for your stretch goals, if applicable. I like having a concentrated section for the reviewer videos and articles, but I also like to see highlight quotes sprinkled in other sections, especially if the quote is relevant to that section. For example, if someone gives you a great quote talking about the components, add that to the what's in the box section.

Before you fund, at least show that you are planning stretch goals, even if they aren't revealed yet as backers will ask in the

comments. Not all campaigns need stretch goals, so don't force that if yours doesn't need them. If you do them, I would shift them up on the page after you fund to make them a little more prominent. You can move them up below the what's in the box section for the biggest impact since you are now influencing that value proposition for potential backers checking out your page.

From here, drop in other information you want to share like a section on shipping, meet the team, etc. If you receive a question, be sure to both clear it up on your page so others won't have the same question and add it to the FAQs. You can't write FAQs on the page before you launch, so if you know for sure that you have some that you want to include, go ahead and draft them out in advance and then pop them on there after you launch.

Be visual. Be concise. Show the hype! If there was ever a time when you shouldn't be humble, this is it. Showcase why your game is amazing and make sure everyone knows it, even if it's not for them and they don't back it.

What's your best advice for someone wanting to run a Kickstarter campaign?

Kickstarter is going to take you on one of the strangest emotional rollercoasters of your life. Nervousness, stress, vulnerability, excitement, drowning, disappointment, frustration, adulation, and more. All in a few short weeks. There really is nothing like it nor anything you can do to prepare yourself for it.

Try not to dwell on every little minor thing that doesn't go your way. You are going to have backers cancel. It's a fact. Don't stress or get mad. You're going to have someone back the game...then cancel...then back again an hour later...then cancel five minutes before the campaign ends. You can't explain it, so there's no use working yourself up over it. Focus on the broader picture, but don't lose sight of the details. Each day will have its ups and downs, and one side is oftentimes in greater supply than the other.

Take responsibility for everything, even if you weren't directly responsible, and work to resolve it. Always remember that no one

is going to care as much about your campaign as you will, so don't rely on others to carry the flag for you. Kickstarter is a platform. Nothing more. Everything else with your campaign starts and stops with you.

How do you deal with the mid-campaign slump?

Everyone knows you get a rush at the beginning and end. The rush at the beginning is because you worked hard over months to build up your initial interest. The rush at the end is because you worked hard during the slump to build up for your final push.

The mid-campaign is where you need to do everything you can to keep driving campaign awareness. Fortunately, the Kickstarter dashboard gives you a nice barometer to keep a daily watch for how well you are doing to keep your game in front of people: Follower count.

After your first few days, you'll have a good idea of what your Follower to Follower Conversion rate percentage is. This rate can vary from campaign to campaign, but you'll know yours around day three or so. During the mid-campaign period, you need to drive up that follower count every day while, at minimum, holding the conversion rate constant. By holding the conversion constant, you'll see monetary growth in your campaign daily totals with positive new backers (assuming you don't have a backer hemorrhage issue going on which indicates another problem).

The key about the follower count is that at the 48-hour window all of them will get a notification. It's at that point where you will stop seeing your follower count grow but will instead watch that conversion rate climb. The percentage total growth will also vary by campaign, but it should climb by 50-100% or more (ex. from 8% to 20%). By simple math, you'll see why it's important to have that follower count reach as high as possible, because every percentage point lift will be a larger actual number of converted backers.

To grow that number during the mid-campaign window, you'll be battling all of the new campaigns who come on the scene every week. Hold back some of your reviews to release the second week.

Schedule the bulk of your ads to kick in at this time, especially if you can't afford to run them throughout the entire campaign. Have planned live stream interviews with content creators that week, host your own live streams of plays, have other content creators do live plays that you sponsor and give away copies of the game, etc. This second week is your promotional push week and in many ways is the most critical single media week that will contribute to your success.

What would you tell someone who just ran a campaign that failed to fund?

Kickstarter isn't easy. There is no magic method or secret sauce. Just going through the process to create something from nothing is hard. Not everyone who sits around and wants to make a game ends up doing it. Just by creating the game, preparing for Kickstarter, and hitting that green button to launch is an achievement not many actually reach. High five for that. You should be proud of that part alone.

You didn't fund. So what. You can sulk and complain about it. You may even want to blame others claiming too many other campaigns on the same day. Whatever excuse you want to make up. Just stop. Knock the dust off your trousers, wipe the blood off your chin, and get up. Even seasoned creators get punched in the face. Sure, it hurts, but this isn't where you stop.

Think about everything you did to get to that point and assess the steps you took leading up to the campaign. Were you even ready to launch? Many aren't. Listen to the backers and other communities you engage with and then, most importantly, take action to fix it.

If people say your price is too high, have you done everything you can to cost and price your game properly? Did people even know about your campaign, or did you think Kickstarter was going to bring you all of the traffic to fund without you putting in the time to build your own audience? The latter will not happen. Evaluate your marketing mix by looking at your metrics. Were you creating the right messages to the right audiences at the right time?

Failing to fund is when self-reflection and talking to your community is absolutely critical. This is not the time to wear your blinders and refuse to listen. Evaluate the feedback, create a new plan, build toward that plan, and hit that green button again only when you are ready.

Looking to the future, how do you think Kickstarter is going to change? And what can future creators do to adjust?

Long gone are the days of throwing up an idea and having people give you money to make your dream. Good is no longer acceptable. You've got to bring your A-game and then some. Your campaign has to stand out and look as polished as the page next to yours that has way more resources at their disposal than you do. You can complain about it, but it's just a fact.

Be better and do better with less. Kickstarter isn't going to just hand it to you; you've got to make yourself successful. And that's where the platform is today. Right now. Not even a few years from now.

What works today on Kickstarter may no longer work in a few years. Or a few months. The best thing you can do is keep studying other creators and backing projects. Watch the trends to see if certain things are shifting. That's how you continuously adjust and evolve so that you aren't trying to launch a campaign using tactics from five years ago that haven't worked in four years.

You're going to likely see Kickstarter get harder and harder for first-timers who don't put in an extraordinary amount of effort. This is already happening and is only going to escalate as the influx of new super backers drops below the volume of super backers currently on the platform who start pulling back from actively buying new games.

I've already seen people who historically back a lot of games starting to reduce their Kickstarter volume. If the new people coming into the Kickstarter ecosystem that get fired up to back a lot of games doesn't grow faster than current backers burn themselves out, then the market will compress. As the market compresses, those companies with existing fan bases will be at a far greater advantage than someone coming in brand new. Unless you put in the time and work to stand out.

Conor McGoey

Inside Up Games | insideupgames.com | [@InsideUpGames](https://twitter.com/InsideUpGames)

7	5,593	\$194,574
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Gorus Maximus, Summit. City Builder: Ancient World
POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What did the marketing plan look like leading up to your most recent campaign's launch?

This latest one was VERY different. I have established friends and connections in all areas of the board game industry, they all help in their own medium to bring attention to my projects. This is the first campaign where I chose to spend very little on “marketing” as the ROI from all my previous “guaranteed returns” had dropped significantly.

However I also used Tabletopia like crazy, personally teaching many content creators the game to help gain exposure, and to record “live-streams” which later were used on the campaign.

What is the best Kickstarter campaign page (or pages) you've seen and why?

For me that would be Scythe by Stonemaier games. It blew my mind for what a “crowdfunded game” could be. Everything from the art to the mechanics to the presentation was in a class higher than games I see at my local game store. Although the truth is it was also disheartening because after seeing Scythe, I didn't think my game would stand a chance.

The other good news is that it led me to Jamey Stegmaier's Kickstarter blog and crowdfunding book, which I studied thoroughly.

What was the biggest mistake you made before, during, or after a campaign, and how did you overcome it?

I over-delivered on my first campaign by upgrading everyone's order to include more than they pledged for. I thought this would help me stand out and gain some loyal followers, but I didn't think about the fact that these backers have their own things going on, and it's unlikely that almost a year later they would remember what they had even pledged for.

I have no way of knowing how successful that strategy was, but little was ever said about it.

What's your best advice for someone wanting to run a Kickstarter campaign?

Do your research, talk to others, do more research, triple check your numbers, be active in the community without just pushing your game, and get proper help with testers, editors, proofreaders, creators. If backers think something in the campaign stinks, they will walk away.

If you are small and starting out, keep it personal without taking it all personal. Put yourself out there and trust that the majority of backers are wonderful people.

I write a "thank you note" to each backer I get. It's an insane amount of work, and VERY time consuming, but I get great replies and lots of followers/fans from this simple gesture.

How do you maintain your health and sanity during a campaign?

In the beginning, I didn't. This is hard, and it is very important. Running a campaign well is a full-time job, if you don't have the ability to add another 40+ hours to your week then reach out to friends and add them as collaborators. They can help you with backer questions, campaign updates, and pretty much everything.

Then, exercise, eat well, and sleep well. It's easy to fall into the trap of "but there is always someone awake somewhere, I need to be active." That will run you into the ground. Do your best to set boundaries and adhere to them. It'll save you.

What's your best advice for creating campaign updates?

Keep them clear and concise with lots of pretty pictures. Videos aren't always great because of language barriers, and "time to watch" isn't always possible. I like to include a little bit of a personal/family touch to my updates to connect with backers and to show them a little bit about who they are supporting - I'm not some faceless company. I am constantly surprised by backers requesting these family updates any time they are missed. But by this point, after seven Kickstarters over four years, they have watched me and my family grow. and I see a LOT of return backers.

Curt Covert

Smirk & Dagger Games | smirkanddagger.com | [@SmirkandDagger](https://twitter.com/SmirkandDagger)

1	1,067	\$36,769
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING
Cindr		
POPULAR CAMPAIGNS		

What makes a game a good product for Kickstarter?

Buzz value. In the mass market, companies often choose games based on the “TV moment,” where the excitement of the game comes to life on screen. Similar here. What is the “ooh - ahh!” of your product that gets people excited above and beyond what we assume are great mechanics.

Finely crafted minis, beautiful illustrations, a must-have license, a really compelling theme, borrowed interest from influencers/ celebs... something amazing that I think will only get better if I support the project.

Also, badge value. Does owning this Kickstarter version of the game give me a bit of geeky status for having the extra bells and whistles that retail buyers won't have? Some projects are naturally better suited to this kind of build-out than others. Choose the projects that excite and dazzle.

What did the marketing plan look like leading up to your most recent campaign's launch?

Marketing is about getting noticed, so doing all the expected and required things are important, but standing out is critical. Cindr is a game about dating dragons, so we leaned into the theme and sent

physical, custom Valentine's Day cards to every reviewer and social influencer we could think of, encouraging them to date a dragon (and spread the word). We followed this up with a Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram promotion where fans could sign up for a digital dragon Valentine to be sent to a loved one on Valentine's Day. And because we were parodying dating apps, we posted pics that mimicked Tinder ads, which featured amazing dragon art and headlines like, "Don't Fly Solo." Those got a lot of views!

What was the biggest mistake you made before, during, or after a campaign, and how did you overcome it?

Through a miscommunication, we ended up launching on Valentine's Day, which was perfectly thematic but was on a Friday leading into a weekend, instead of the Tuesday before. Weekends are dead times and Holidays are no better, it turns out. Our first three days, the most critical to a campaign, were down 50% of expectation and slowed momentum.

Towards the halfway point, the combination of this and our somewhat higher than usual funding goal made us wonder if we would fund at all. But we had planned several promotions throughout the campaign. Since this was our first campaign after sixteen years of making games, we thought drafting off other like-minded game companies with larger Kickstarter communities already established might help.

We worked with four companies to bring some of their characters as playable guest stars into our game. I'd chosen to feature Pooky from The Red Dragon Inn, by SlugFest Games, as our guest to battle the mid-campaign doldrums. Interestingly, our audiences are very similar, and the announcement which we coordinated in both our active Kickstarter campaigns drove backers to us, with one of our biggest spikes in the dead center of the project, funding us and fueling the momentum that made our Kickstarter truly successful. Always plan for the worst, and have a plan for course correction.

What's your best advice for someone wanting to run a Kickstarter campaign?

Know where your knowledge or skill gaps are likely to be, and hire someone to fill those gaps. There are lots of freelance sources if you don't have them in-house. Kickstarters are a tremendous amount of work, and you can't expect to be the superstar in every aspect of a campaign. Right behind that is assuring you have open, frequent, and clear communication with everyone on the team and your backers. Miscommunication, or too little communication, can lead to issues.

How do you maintain your health and sanity during a campaign?

As a first-timer this year... it can be rough. I've made games for sixteen years and have never been so frazzled by the process. It is the moment-to-moment, real-time feedback that drives you mad. You cannot avoid monitoring the campaign, but know when to say goodnight.

You will look at every up and down as the rollercoaster it is, but know that it is the trend you should be most mindful of and can try to correct for. The process verges on obsession. Take a breath. Step away for a bit. And power through the toughest parts. I am now quite sure that Kickstarter takes a certain mettle to endure and endure well. It may not be for everyone. But know that there is a finish line, and you will get there.

How do you deal with the mid-campaign slump?

Re-activate your community or find a similar community to draft upon to introduce the game anew. Promotions and tie-ins can be a powerful way to bring an audience just outside of your current sphere to you and your project. One's reach may be limited alone, but there are other communities where you may have crossover.

Find ways to form partnerships with those at the center of those other communities and co-promote to both audiences. The gaming industry is somewhat unique in how companies and creators,

whom by other industry's standards would be staunch competitors, find synergies and collaborations that are mutually beneficial. We are all friends here and cheerlead for each other. Make those plans before the slump. Assume you will have one. And activate the plan with proper coordination when you do.

Looking to the future, how do you think Kickstarter is going to change? And what can future creators do to adjust?

It's changed so much already and will continue to evolve, as the game industry changes. The original idea was to allow those who might never be able to produce a game to be enabled by passionate believers. Sixteen years ago, I could have avoided funding my first game by having to take out a second mortgage on my house (which I don't recommend).

Then it became such excellent marketing for a project that a strong Kickstarter could make significant waves in the marketplace before it even released. Companies of all sizes jumped into the fray. For more established companies, it allowed pet projects to come into being that wouldn't have seen the light of day otherwise. But lowering the bar to a level where anyone had a possibility of producing their dream opened the marketplace with exponential growth that it now struggles to support.

The traditional distribution system buckled, unable to appropriately stock all the titles in a year. That's what drove me, finally, to Kickstarter. Small to mid-size publishers now need the support and cash flow to stay in business or to vet products before they reach the marketplace. Kickstarter levels the playing field and puts the consumer at the center.

There will always be room for someone new with an amazing idea to publish their dream. But the increasing importance of a company's community of fans will ensconce publishers of all sizes to participate. And for each, knowing how to look at your product and discover and showcase those elements within it to entice and excite consumers becomes more important than ever! There is almost no room for a "good" game anymore. Continue until you have crafted a great game with a compelling hook that draws hearts and minds to it.

D. Brad Talton Jr.

Level 99 Games | level99games.com | @Level99Games

20	35,412	\$2,936,165
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Millenium Blades, Battle Con, Argent: the Consortium
POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What do you wish you would have known before running a Kickstarter campaign?

Factor in your time to develop and illustrate the game as part of your base cost. If you only consider production and shipping costs, you're treating your creative property and your efforts as if they were worthless.

What's your best advice for someone wanting to run a Kickstarter campaign?

Back twenty Kickstarter projects for \$1 apiece. Read all the updates. Try to pick ten that you think will succeed wildly, and ten that you think will bomb. Preferably games similar to yours, if there are enough projects to make that work.

How do you maintain your health and sanity during a campaign?

Business is stressful and it's important to keep a level head. I resolve not to do anything the same day I think of it, but instead share ideas with my team and take their input seriously.

I recommend turning off notifications from Kickstarter PMs and New Backer Alerts. Resign yourself to only check on your cam-

ampaign—and more importantly, to only care about it—during business hours, and you’ll be a lot better off for it.

Diluting your efforts over 16 hours is much less effective than a normal, focused workday, even during Kickstarter projects.

How do you deal with the mid-campaign slump?

We do our best to engage our fans with content updates and in-person livecasts during the middle of a campaign. This is a golden time when the early adopters can get to know you and your brand. Don’t waste it feeling bad because you aren’t making as many sales as on days 1–3, and don’t try to convert your early adopters into evangelists making a hard sell on your behalf. Instead, be cool and focus on the project that you all love.

What’s your best advice for creating campaign updates?

Update regularly, even if there’s no news. You can use this ‘dead air’ to talk about the game itself, the content you’ve created, other projects, and even the world. Keeping up regular, consistent communication is key to keeping your fans engaged and confident in your ability to deliver, even when there are delays.

Updates are easy when everything is going well and a project is on schedule. This is an opportunity to build trust and rapport with your supporters.

If there are delays, put on a positive face, and don’t stop updating when it gets difficult. Focus on reporting the situation accurately without alarm. Focus on your guarantee of delivery and quality assurance. Let fans know that you’re doing everything you can do, and resist pressure to do anything more, such as issuing “apology discounts” or “apology extras.”

Always stand behind the partners you’ve selected for art, manufacturing, and fulfillment, even if you aren’t thrilled with their choices or even if you’re incensed with their mistakes. Don’t ever throw your partners under the bus just to avoid culpability for a production or shipping mistake. In the end, you’ll just spoil the

confidence of your fans, and they'll still blame you anyway for poor partner selection.

What's your best advice for the fulfillment process after the game is manufactured?

If you're starting out, offer your project only within your home country. You might miss a few overseas sales, but you're going to save yourself significant headaches, and you'll be able to focus your full attention on delivering a world-class experience in your home country.

If you've done great marketing and your audience has grown (generally, over 500 people), it's a good time to partner up with a fulfillment center. Once you've got this process down, you can repeat it to add new zones, fulfilling Asia, Europe, Canada, etc, each with a different center. I wouldn't recommend adding a zone unless you believe you'll sell at least 200 units in that zone—the overhead just isn't worth it, and superfans overseas can always use freight forwarders.

If you've run multiple campaigns, what did you do differently and why?

We plan more and more with each campaign we run. We try to get a complete picture of logistics, production, shipping, and artwork, both in terms of time and money, so that we can set aside funds for any shocks that occur. You can't plan too much when you're working so far in advance.

As a corollary to that though, a plan is only as good as the team executing it. Take time to educate your team about not just what your plans are but also why your plans are what they are. This will allow your team members to make decisions for themselves that won't spoil or complicate the master plan. It will also take a lot of the work off of you.

Looking to the future, how do you think Kickstarter is going to change? And what can future creators do to adjust?

Kickstarter is already taking more steps to ensure that creators finish projects before starting new ones, to root out those who are leveraging past projects against future ones. Creators need to be sure that they're accurately planning their costs in order to continue to do business on this platform. The best position to be in is where your Kickstarter sales are a bonus, not a necessity, to carrying out your plans.

Daniel Aronson

El Dorado Games | eldorado.games | @eldoradogames

7	23,453	\$1,450,990
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

The Island of El Dorado, Windward, Taco Fight!

POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What do you wish you would have known before running a Kickstarter campaign?

Before clicking the big green button the first time, I wish I knew how it would consume my whole life. I thought I would be able to separate it from normal life and check back periodically, but nope! That first night that I had a campaign live, I woke up every two hours to check on the status. It's just so exciting!

What is the best Kickstarter campaign page (or pages) you've seen and why?

When designing a campaign page, I am always looking at other pages to see what other people are doing well. I am always looking back at the Moonrakers and Tidal Blades pages. They are both beautifully designed. Moonrakers used GIFs to make every single component interesting. GIFs for days! Even though Tidal Blades had a TON of information on the page, it isn't overwhelming.

What's your best advice for creating campaign updates?

No matter if you have 10k backers or less than 100, be genuinely excited and thankful that these backers chose your project. They had so many choices, and they believed in YOUR creation. Be excited to update them, and remember that they are real people!

What's your best advice for the fulfillment process after the game is manufactured?

Have someone else do it. I've never had to really worry about it because I used Funagain Logistics and they really just took it from the manufacturer and got it done. The only thing I had to do was send updates and respond to emails - definitely worth every penny!

Daniel Zayas

The Daniel Zayas Company | dzayas.com | @ZayasGames

2	1,622	\$34,431
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Tangled Timelines, When Cutie Met Patootie

POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What do you wish you would have known before running a Kickstarter campaign?

Charge more per unit and be more careful with your pre-launch budget. The margins you are currently planning for are going to be outdated in 3,2,1.

What did the marketing plan look like leading up to your most recent campaign's launch?

Honestly, you need to build friendships and partnerships with the people you are relying on to champion your products. If neither of you is excited about cross-pollination then why are either of you there?

What is the best Kickstarter campaign page (or pages) you've seen and why?

It depends on the context, because a lot of campaigns do certain things I like and other things I don't. I'm also aware that plenty of best practices today are old hat tomorrow. For me, you should know who your customer is because they are not "all backers." And then look at the most successful campaigns in that genre and read every comment in those campaigns.

What was the biggest mistake you made before, during, or after a campaign, and how did you overcome it?

I spent too much money on the prelaunch spectacle than maybe was necessary or worthwhile financially. But I also enjoy myself more that way, which is why I build campaigns in the first place.

What's your best advice for someone wanting to run a Kickstarter campaign?

Partner with other people in your projects. It is next to impossible to do this alone anymore. You will miss things. And those things will cost you time, money, and reputation.

How do you maintain your health and sanity during a campaign?

Set boundaries as part of a campaign in both time you will be available and the type of environment you will tolerate. Many creators do not set healthy boundaries, and it shows in their campaigns and toxic culture breeding.

How do you deal with the mid-campaign slump?

Release important campaign details over time and space out your promotional pushes and content releases.

What's your best advice for creating campaign updates?

Once per week for live campaigns, once per month after. Literally tell people that is your plan so they have that boundary in mind.

What's your best advice for the fulfillment process after the game is manufactured?

Fulfillment for your first few projects will take longer than you think it will, and will require many more emails than you think it will. The factory needs to assemble pallets of product in the correct quantities for the correct regions. Those pallets need very specific information that will allow your product to pass customs. Then, the factory needs to hire a driver to take your product to the port.

Then, a freight ship needs to move your product on their schedule in likely a less than container load. Then, someone needs to receive the product at each region port. Then, they need to drive the product to the fulfillment facility. Then, they need to properly package your orders depending on the complexity of the project. Only then does a product start making its way to the end consumer.

If you've run multiple campaigns, what did you do differently and why?

I made them shorter and used simpler language. It is so easy to write a novel on Kickstarter that no one reads when they are thinking about buying a game. It's all emotional responses to your marketing and art, etc.

What would you tell someone who just ran a campaign that failed to fund?

You either did not talk to enough people about the campaign strategy and the product or you did not listen to their advice. Fix that or partner with someone who can.

Looking to the future, how do you think Kickstarter is going to change? And what can future creators do to adjust?

All changes to the Kickstarter platform will be minor, but the paradigm in crowdfunding is always in motion. Creators can adjust their campaigns to be more of a spectacle. Involve a lot more people into the process and leverage that talent.

Dave Clarke

Sinister Fish Games | sinisterfish.com | @thesinisterfish

2	14,915	\$491,760
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Villagers, Great Scott!
POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

How do you deal with the mid-campaign slump?

For Villagers, we had a hump instead of a slump, which you can see on Kicktraq. The campaign gained momentum in the middle, partly because we were one of the “hot” games at UK Games Expo that year, and we were at the convention during the campaign. Our booth was packed from start to finish with people doing demos, and a lot of them pledged immediately after playing.

Also, I can’t emphasise how important Facebook ads were to us. We spent a lot and monitored closely. We were ready to pull the plug the second those ads stopped making more than they cost, but they kept on performing, with people constantly sharing them and tagging their friends. I should stress that this wasn’t something we expected!

I’m of the opinion that a mid-campaign hump is essentially impossible to generate on purpose and that slumps are inevitable unless you get very lucky. Think of a few massive Kickstarter successes, and go look at their daily data on Kicktraq; most of them had slumps.

The three most funded games ever on Kickstarter: Kingdom Death 1.5, Exploding Kittens, and 7th Continent all had slumps.

If those campaigns couldn't overcome it, no one can. Slumps are just part of the journey. I think the best strategy is to try & fund before the slump (on day one if possible) and not have to face the doldrums before reaching the magic 100%.

I believe in playing it safe unless you can afford to take risks, so for a first-time campaign I would advise a small & simple game at an impulse-buy price point and a low (but genuine) funding goal.

The momentum for a strong start to a campaign (assuming the game is good and the campaign page presents it well) comes from four directions:

- 1) Bringing your own crowd. Messaging via the email list & social media channels you've been curating for at least a year and updates on your previous Kickstarter campaigns if you've done any. But be careful not to be too spammy with any of this!
- 2) Word-of-mouth, by which I mean not doing anything and relying on social media buzz/shares, and plain old discovery via Kickstarter which can fund campaigns on its own if the project is attractive to the Kickstarter backer community. I'm convinced that if you put a great game with great art on Kickstarter without telling anyone, it will still fund & do well. The Kickstarter backer community is massive. They browse new projects, talk about what they're backing, and know quality when they see it. I don't recommend relying on this approach alone though!
- 3) Paid advertising. I highly recommend carefully targeted Facebook ads, and BoardGameGeek's advertising & promotion services. I've tried several other avenues for advertising, but those are the only two I know of that produce a meaningful volume of backers. Of course, advertising isn't a magic bullet, and people don't automatically back projects just because they saw an ad. Ads must be effective and the project they link to must be irresistible.
- 4) Preview videos. It's fairly obvious, but it can make a big difference to the start of a campaign if you have several previews drop on launch day. The more views, the better as you want as many

eyes on your project page as possible in the first two days.

There's a rule of thumb that says the first three days, the entire middle, and the final two days of a campaign will each raise ~33% of whatever your total funding ends up being. It seems to hold true in most cases, and you can use it to make uncanny funding predictions, as I did on a just-for-fun BGG thread: <https://tinyurl.com/uprqr9u>. The prediction was so accurate I was accused of being a time traveler!

So, after three days you can have an idea of not only if you will fund or not but also approximately how much you'll overfund. There's some wiggle room in each stage; it's not always 33%, but if you come out of the first three days with less than 20%, your campaign will very likely struggle to fund. Ultimately, if you worked hard on 1-4 above and you still struggle to get anyone outside of your friends & family circle excited about your game, then it's probably not a marketable product.

What's your best advice for the fulfillment process after the game is manufactured?

If you haven't done it before, fulfillment is harder and more complicated than you think it is. Leave it to the professionals. You could do it yourself for maybe half the price but don't. If your campaign blows up you will be in huge trouble if you didn't charge enough for shipping and don't have the infrastructure to send out ten times more games than you anticipated.

Debbie Moynihan & Rob Dougherty

White Wizard Games | whitewizardgames.com | @wwizardgames

8	54,546	\$4,053,748
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Star Realms, Epic, Hero Realms
POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What did the marketing plan look like leading up to your most recent campaign's launch?

Our marketing plan for a campaign includes: a landing page, Kickstarter page creation checklist, email marketing, Facebook ads, BoardGameGeek ads, digital in-app ads, digital graphics and videos, card spoilers, convention promotions, and referral codes. We have a plan for pre-launch marketing, a checklist for the day of launch, mid-campaign, final three days, and post-campaign. In future campaigns, we will be doing more live videos, since we have ramped up our capabilities on those due to COVID-19.

What was the biggest mistake you made before, during, or after a campaign, and how did you overcome it?

We have been overly optimistic about our delivery dates. There are many steps and many things that are outside of your control that happen between the Kickstarter and final fulfillment. We now build in extra time beyond the timeline that we anticipate for delivery to allow for unanticipated surprises. Communication with your backers and delivering an exceptional product can mitigate these types of issues. Our goal is to post updates at least monthly even if we don't have a lot of news to post.

How do you deal with the mid-campaign slump?

We reduced our campaign length and were pleasantly surprised that it didn't seem to impact our success. We used to do thirty-day campaigns, but we've moved it down to twenty-three days.

If you've done your pre-marketing effectively, you will get many backers when you launch; you will have a lot of activity in the final forty-eight hours; and you will have a slower mid-campaign. We estimate that about a third of our funding will happen in each of these three phases.

Let your backers know that things are expected to slow down in the middle of the campaign, and this is a great time to engage with social media goals and spoilers.

What's your best advice for the fulfillment process after the game is manufactured?

You should figure out your plan before kicking off your Kickstarter! Fulfilling a game yourself is a very tedious job, but it can be done if your product is relatively simple.

There are partners that can manage worldwide fulfillment for you, and there are regional partners. I recommend asking other creators, with similar products, about how they handled their fulfillment. The Tabletop Game Kickstarter Advice Facebook Group is a valuable resource for creators to share information with each other on fulfillment and everything else.

If you've run multiple campaigns, what did you do differently and why?

We are continuously trying out new things. We have worked with several third parties to assist with marketing, specifically Facebook ads. We have shortened the length of our campaigns. We have tried running a campaign without Stretch Goals, which was very successful. We have increased our planning because we know what to expect and what will be needed based on our past experiences.

Frank West

City of Games | thecityofkings.com | @CityofGamesHQ

4	15,787	\$1,119,402
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

The Isle of Cats, The City of Kings
POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What's your best advice for someone wanting to run a Kickstarter campaign?

The secret to a successful campaign is planning. It is very easy to design a game and put it on Kickstarter, but without the right thought process, you are destined to struggle. From the moment you have an idea you should start thinking about manufacturing, importing, fulfillment, community building, updates, stretch goals, and more.

I never decide on a Kickstarter launch date until my game is finished and ready to go live. I then give myself 2 – 3 months to prepare the Kickstarter page, create a marketing plan, finalise pricing, and get everything ready before pressing launch.

How do you deal with the mid-campaign slump?

We all know the middle of a campaign is slower than the start and end, and these days many people are reducing the length of their campaigns to avoid it. Personally, I see the middle of the campaign as a way to experiment, build a community, and to spread the word to the furthest parts of the internet.

The key thing is to have a plan, and don't wait until the middle of your campaign has arrived. Before you launch, you should write

down what you're going to do on which days. I released a 3-part comic, 1-part per week during the mid-campaign, ran live streams, and balanced this with a social media presence that made our latest campaign's middle stronger than the start or end – It can be done!

What's your best advice for creating campaign updates?

Updates can be used for many things, often people will use them to talk about stretch goals, share information about the game, and generally inform people about what is going on. I believe this is a good use of some updates, but the key is to encourage engagement and to get people interacting with you.

A good update should ask people questions, give reasons for them to make suggestions, and provide a 2-way channel of communication. What weapon would you like to see in the game? What name would you give a character? What cool abilities would you add to a new enemy? These types of questions encourage people to be more familiar with the game, interact, and can even give you ideas.

What's your best advice for the fulfillment process after the game is manufactured?

There are many ways to do fulfillment, and perhaps the best is the one that works to your strengths. If you enjoy micromanagement then you probably want to source your own importing services, work with multiple fulfillment centres, and manage everything directly. If you struggle with logistics and worry about this side of the process, then perhaps you should find a single fulfillment centre you can partner with to take over the process.

There are many fulfillment centres that will manage importing and partner with other centres from all around the world, so they can do everything for you. Of course, this isn't the cheapest option, but if it works better for you and takes away the risk of expensive mistakes, it may be the best one.

What would you tell someone who just ran a campaign that failed to fund?

Read through the comments on your Kickstarter page, ask backers questions in an update, and identify the weaknesses. Perhaps it's the lack of reviews, the pricing, or the artwork. With the issue identified, you can work on fixing this and launch a better campaign the second time around.

If you don't have many comments, then perhaps you need to focus on building more of a community outside of the Kickstarter before trying again. The most important thing is to keep people updated, don't rush to relaunch the campaign, set a timeline, make it public, and show people how you've worked towards improving the product for the second time around.

Gabe Barrett

Barrett Publishing | barrettpublishing.com | @BGDesignLab

7	6,398	\$185,586
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Board Game Design Advice, HUNTED, Board Game Kickstarter Advice

POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What was the biggest mistake you made before, during, or after a campaign, and how did you overcome it?

For my campaign for Hunted, I didn't price the rewards correctly. I made the game \$19 thinking that that price would really draw people in, and then I charged \$9 for shipping (which was the actual cost).

However, I ran into a lot of potential backers who were turned off by shipping being almost half the price of the game. I would have been better off charging \$25 for the game and \$3 for shipping as perception matters more than reality when it comes to pricing.

What's your best advice for someone wanting to run a Kickstarter campaign?

Start small. Runaway success destroys more Kickstarter creators than failure does. You're going to make mistakes when you're just starting out, and it's much better to make a mistake with 300 backers than 3,000. It's the difference between a \$5 mistake costing you \$1,500 vs \$15,000.

So, for your first project or two, don't be too ambitious. Make games with low price points that are cheap to produce and cheap to ship. Learn the ropes, build an audience, and scale up from there.

What's your best advice for the fulfillment process after the game is manufactured?

Hire someone else to do it. At this point, there are lots of companies that you can pay to get your game from the manufacturer to backers' tables, and it's worth every penny. The more time you spend dealing with shipping, logistics, and fulfillment, the less time you have for designing new games, marketing, and building your company.

If you've run multiple campaigns, what did you do differently and why?

I'm no longer offering any Kickstarter exclusive content. After hearing from so many backers how much they hate it when they miss a campaign and can't get the exclusives, I've decided to do away with the idea.

Instead, I'm going to put a lot of stretch goal content into an expansion box that will be free to backers but then available for purchase after the campaign is over. This will reward backers for jumping in early to bring the game to life and will also allow late-comers an opportunity to get all the cool bonus content.

What would you tell someone who just ran a campaign that failed to fund?

It doesn't count against you for future campaigns as some kind of "strike on your permanent record." Some of the most successful Kickstarter creators in the world have had to relaunch campaigns for all sorts of reasons. Simply regroup, go back to the drawing board, and do whatever it takes to set yourself up for success next time.

Gil Hova

Formal Ferret Games | formalferretgames.com | [@FormalFerret](https://twitter.com/FormalFerret)

7	10,195	\$405,991
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

The Networks, High Rise, The Rival Networks
POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What makes a game a good product for Kickstarter?

Value. Backers want to see value. Either a low price or a LOT of useful stuff for a high price. (The stuff has to be useful, of course!)

What's your best advice for someone wanting to run a Kickstarter campaign?

Start small! No more than 54 cards. Okay, maybe 108 cards and a few tokens. But no minis, no board, no custom or unique components. You won't make much money, but you won't need much money.

Small projects mean small mistakes. Big projects mean big mistakes.

What's your best advice for creating campaign updates?

Don't flood your backers with updates! You can have multiple updates on your launch day and your final day, but in-between, try to keep it to one update every two days, at most. Otherwise, they'll start to tune you out.

What would you tell someone who just ran a campaign that failed to fund?

Regroup, recalibrate, and relaunch! You'll get a bunch of backers returning, and that momentum will generally mean a better second campaign.

Have you tried multiple times? It might mean that the world is not ready for your game. The good news is, this is not the worst-case scenario. Imagine if you'd actually shelled out a few thousand dollars and now you have inventory that just takes up space. I've seen that happen, and it isn't pretty.

Instead, make it as a print-on-demand game, play it at your local convention, and try Kickstarter with another project!

Looking to the future, how do you think Kickstarter is going to change? And what can future creators do to adjust?

It's going to get harder and harder for one-person independent creators; we just can't support the kind of quality that larger publishers can put out, in terms of graphics and customer support. Don't count on hitting the jackpot; use Kickstarter to realize a minimum viable product, and build a community that enjoys that product.

Helaina Cappel

Burnt Island Games | burntislandgames.com | @burntislandgm

3	17,175	\$1,331,662
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Endeavor: Age of Sail, In The Hall of the Mountain King,
Endeavor: Age of Expansion

POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What is the best Kickstarter campaign page (or pages) you've seen and why?

Roxley Kickstarter campaigns blow all other campaigns out of the water. The graphic design is elegant. The information on the page is concise. The images are stunning. They run a nice, neat, and clean campaign every time. Also, the Mind MGMT Kickstarter had some really exciting, gamey things happening on the page. From my perspective, this is really how we should be running campaigns.

How do you maintain your health and sanity during a campaign?

When we first started in this business, it was our full-time job to worry. But we have since learned that it's important to take a step back every day and spend some time on ourselves. I exercise quite a bit, so that gives me some relief from the constant barrage of messages and comments. We also have someone else working with us now who helps us message backers, so this alleviates some of the pressure.

How do you deal with the mid-campaign slump?

The mid-campaign slump looks different for different campaigns. We're making our campaigns shorter these days so that

there is only a one week slump instead of two. We find that it feels a lot better to have one week of surge, one week of slump, and then one week of buildup again.

Many people tear their hair out during this time, but we find that it is an opportunity for us to do more. During that one week, we do more planning for the end of the campaign. We also take the time to push the campaign the hardest. If we have a live play-through planned, this is when we do it. We do a lot of advertising during this time as well.

What's your best advice for creating campaign updates?

Backers are fickle about updates. If they think it doesn't pertain to them, they absolutely won't read it. Begin with an interesting subject line. Make the subject as brief as you can. For the body of the update itself, be sure to include only the most important information (long-winded updates are rarely read through). If you can, include images and/or videos. As the campaign progresses, people will read fewer and fewer of them. So you have to be brief and engaging from the get-go.

If you've run multiple campaigns, what did you do differently and why?

We understand what to expect from a Kickstarter campaign now as we are working on our ninth campaign at the moment. First and foremost, we start with a game that we think is going to stand out on Kickstarter. Table presence is everything in today's industry, but Kickstarter presence is even more important.

Once we've got that building block in place, we set a realistic funding goal. It is always important for us to fund early so that the momentum continues throughout the campaign. During the campaign, we engage backers with polls and contests. We send frequent, but not overly frequent, updates with only pertinent information as well as links to share, images, and information. These things really get a campaign going!

James Hudson

Druid City Games | druidcitygames.com | @DruidCityGames

6	29,197	\$2,140,982
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Tidal Blades, Wonderland's War, The Grimm Forest
POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What is the best Kickstarter campaign page (or pages) you've seen and why?

Roxley sets the bar. Gavan and his team are the best. (The company behind Dice Throne.)

What was the biggest mistake you made before, during, or after a campaign, and how did you overcome it?

The biggest mistake I made recently was letting our communication with backers slack after the campaign. It was around the holidays. I was stressed, overworked, and had planned on taking some time off. And on top of that, the project (Tidal Blades) had hit a lull. I was waiting on freelancers to finish several small parts of the project like tweaks to graphics and the rulebook. We were also waiting on some final playtesting notes to come in for the solo mode. So overall, just really small stuff. There wasn't much of an update to share other than, "we are waiting" and "it's the time of year people slow down and take time off." I went into the comments to let backers know those things, but we didn't put out an official update. At the time, I was trying to keep the updates reserved for substantial milestones because if your updates aren't meaningful, some people will unsubscribe, which means that they miss the important fulfillment updates. Inevitably, they end up missing essential info, and they forget to fill out the pledge manager.

What this boils down to is that because I was trying to keep the updates reserved for “important” milestones, it now looks like there was a 3-month lapse in communication. This caused some backers to be understandably concerned. Moving forward, we’re dropping everything into the updates. As creators, the little things can seem inconsequential to us, but I think it’s important to remember that backers aren’t in the trenches with us. So even those little things can be engaging to someone outside of the process.

It’s a really odd system we have to balance on Kickstarter. There are norms that have surfaced over the years. At the end of the day, it doesn’t matter whether you think these norms are good or bad, they’re here, and your backers know them. You have to play by those rules or you will let your backers down.

How do you maintain your health and sanity during a campaign?

I don’t, haha! I make sure to leave some time after the campaign ends to recharge and rest, but during the campaign, there isn’t much you can do about the amount of time and energy it takes to run a campaign really well. It is a 24/7 situation. The best thing you can do is surround yourself with talented people and lean into them for help and support.

What makes a game a good product for Kickstarter?

It needs to be unique above all else. There are over 5,000 games a year coming out. Making a game that is just a slight variation on another game isn’t going to cut it. It will fail. Game art, graphic design, and theme are also at all-time highs, so if your game doesn’t meet some extremely high standards, it will struggle to find an audience.

But the hardest part is that you may not be unbiased enough to judge these yourself. You should seek critical feedback on your project in these areas. It can be really hard to hear at times, but it is vital to making a great product. Getting this feedback early can save you a lot of heart-ache in developing a project that no one really wanted in the first place.

Jamey Stegmaier

Stonemaier Games | stonemaiergames.com | @jameystegmaier

7	34,308	\$3,246,344
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Scythe, Euphoria, Viticulture
POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What's your best advice for someone wanting to run a Kickstarter campaign?

The best research I ever did leading up to my first Kickstarter project was to back a variety of other projects and follow them closely from start to finish. I paid close attention to the strategies used on their project pages and updates, and I compared them to each other in a big spreadsheet.

What is the best Kickstarter campaign page (or pages) you've seen and why?

A few recent Kickstarter project pages that I think did an excellent job were Unsettled and Return to Dark Tower. In my opinion, both did a great job at explaining the unique and exciting elements of their games via text, images, and video. Both had a streamlined set of reward levels, including a retail pledge. Unsettled didn't have stretch goals but instead engaged backers by building a planet together with them, and Return to Dark Tower had an exciting set of stretch goals.

What was the biggest mistake you made before, during, or after a campaign, and how did you overcome it?

I made a lot of mistakes, but perhaps the biggest was offering

Kickstarter exclusives in the Euphoria campaign. At the time, I thought exclusives were the primary way to encourage backers to act now instead of waiting for later. However, I later found that I had designed/created all this cool stuff for Euphoria that I couldn't offer to people who weren't backers because of the exclusive label, and that didn't feel good at all. I want to create cool stuff and share it with as many people as possible for as many years as possible -- not just the people who learn about the game for the few weeks it's on Kickstarter. I overcame it mostly by deciding to pursue a strategy of inclusiveness from then on, and for the items I most wanted to share (the realistic resources), I created new versions of them and sold them instead.

What's your best advice for creating campaign updates?

I receive so many project updates these days that I really appreciate updates where the very top of the update summarizes all of the most important points, followed by a graphic/photo, then all of the details. I think I'd read a lot more updates (or at least part of them) if they were structured that way. Beyond that, I appreciate consistent updates (any news is better than no news) and transparency. Backers understand that not everything is going to go exactly as planned; it's how you present it, respond to it, and fix it that matters.

What's your best advice for the fulfillment process after the game is manufactured?

The method Stonemaier Games introduced to the Kickstarter community back in 2013 is an approach I still recommend today: When your products are manufactured, send them directly to regional fulfillment centers (we work with fulfillment centers in the US, Canada, Europe, and Australia) and ship to backers from there. This is often much more cost-effective to both you and backers (especially when factoring in customs/taxes).

Jason Miceli

Phase Shift Games | phaseshiftgames.com | @PhaseShiftGames

1	7,619	\$259,695
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Dungeon Drop
POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What makes a game a good product for Kickstarter?

Interestingly, before my campaign, I would have answered this question differently. Candidly, we never expected Dungeon Drop to do as well as it did on Kickstarter, being a small box game intended for a mass-market audience. I would have said that while the Kickstarter audience for board games is unquestionably huge, it likely overlaps more-so with hobby gamers.

That said, we somehow managed to attract a sizable audience to our campaign. Many backers indicated this was their first Kickstarter project, so it's possible we tapped into the right marketing channels beforehand. It's also likely that the Kickstarter audience for board games simply keeps growing and expanding in many directions.

Therefore, at the moment I have to conclude that just about any game can be a viable product for Kickstarter. The success of a board game Kickstarter may be much more based on the quality of the campaign and related marketing efforts.

With that said, we all know that people go crazy over games with miniatures. Too much so in my opinion, but I am not the market. Great art is also crucial for games to take off, and that goes hand in hand with the above-mentioned marketing efforts.

How do you maintain your health and sanity during a campaign?

Having a core team was crucial to keeping a level head throughout the campaign. I both admire and feel for those who go it alone. For me, being able to constantly bounce decisions, issues, and ideas off of others not only helped keep my sanity but also made the entire process enjoyable. This is, in fact, an important answer I would give to many questions - having a trusted business partner and countless friends and pseudo-partners in the industry is a godsend, and I wouldn't have it any other way.

In addition to that, you must have a home and work life that fully supports your efforts. You will work late nights, and you will work weekends. You will draft updates on lunch breaks, and you will respond to backer inquiries during dinner. Better to make sure you have the right support structure in place ahead of time, rather than realizing half-way through that one or both sides of the equation are not fully on board with what's happening.

How do you deal with the mid-campaign slump?

I think you need to find ways to double-dip during the middle of the campaign. Provide updates and goals that will spark your community of backers to take action. Spin up your social stretch goals during this time period (e.g.: If 300 people share this post, we'll add X to every pledge). This way people are getting involved in something that may take a couple of days to complete, they'll be interested in the outcome, and all the while they'll be helping you to keep the buzz about your campaign going.

This is also the time we started running some social contests and public polls (mostly driven on BoardGameGeek, which again was a form of double-dipping, since we were able to hit the BGG hotness chart a few times). Take advantage of this "downtime" to develop and launch more involved and interesting public events that will keep people engaged, interested, and hopefully talking to others about your awesome campaign.

What's your best advice for the fulfillment process after the game is manufactured?

You must stay well on top of your freight companies and fulfillment houses, and that means staying in constant communication with your factory as well. For *Dungeon Drop*, we had four different freight companies and six different fulfillment houses. That may seem like a lot, but the other option was to pay a single fulfillment house to “do it all,” and then end up paying four times as much.

Fulfillment is likely the primary portion of a campaign that causes many to say, rightly so, that when you set out to launch a Kickstarter, you're essentially starting a business. You go from being a game designer to being a publisher. A metric ton of logistics comes with this territory, and a lot of it falls in the space of fulfillment.

This is most certainly the least interesting or enjoyable part of running a campaign for many creators, but if you set proper expectations up front, remain diligent with your communications, and stay clear and timely with your responses, you can keep this all under control.

I will also offer up that as soon as fulfillment starts, so too do the requests for replacements for damaged or missing components. Be prepared, have a good plan to intake and manage these requests, and also be prepared for an influx of address change requests, last-minute order add-ons, inquiries as to “why did my friend down the street get their game but I didn't even get my shipping notification email yet,” and reports of shipments being lost in the mail that you now need to make decisions on how to handle.

Before fulfillment even starts, you need to have good answers for each of these scenarios, or you will be caught off guard and feel intense pressure and frustration, which will then spread to your backers.

Jason Tagmire

Button Shy | buttonshygames.com | @buttonshy

44

SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS

39,958

TOTAL BACKERS

\$770,352

TOTAL FUNDING

Button Shy Wallet Games: Reprint Campaign, Stew & Arcane Bakery Clash, 3 Micro Games!

POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What's your best advice for someone wanting to run a Kickstarter campaign?

I am a big fan of studying the campaigns that just barely fund or hit right above their goal, instead of the campaigns that are mega-successful. I look at these to see if I can tell why they didn't do better and what I would do to improve it. I feel like it's a little more grounded and realistic than trying to copy the mega-successful campaigns that are working with price breaks that you won't see in your first projects and fan bases that don't exist in your first projects.

How do you deal with the mid-campaign slump?

I've shortened campaigns to just eleven days to remove the mid-campaign slump. They are just long enough to hit some of the weekly news cycles but they are short enough to have three big initial days, three big ending days, and five days of mid-campaign slump. This way the slump is shorter than the solid days.

My favorite campaign ever was just five days, with a single day in the middle that was both beginning and end. There was no mid-campaign, therefore, no slump.

Looking to the future, how do you think Kickstarter is going to change? And what can future creators do to adjust?

I think (and hope) that things like stretch goals start to become items that help the project and the creator instead of jamming more content into the box. Something like a stretch goal to get new warehouse space to deal with the success or one to treat the designer or artist to a special night out would likely go down very poorly, but I'd love to see that mindset become more accepted. I think creators just need to take chances and get creative again.

Jay Cormier

Off the Page Games | offthepagegames.com | [@bamboozlebros](https://twitter.com/bamboozlebros)

2	3,741	\$169,367
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Fail Faster: Playtesting Journal, Mind MGMT
POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What did the marketing plan look like leading up to your most recent campaign's launch?

As soon as I knew I was going to Kickstart a game (and start a brand new company to do it), I started a YouTube series called, How to Start a Board Game Company. Every week I made a new video detailing what I did that week to contribute to getting this game ready for Kickstarter. I did this for 35 weeks before I launched my Kickstarter.

Some weeks I interviewed someone to learn about a new aspect of starting a board game business, like a finance expert, the Game Trayz guys, or a marketing guru. While this was a small part of my marketing plan, I think it helped get some key people to pay attention and maybe some of those people were influencers.

Then, getting to the real marketing plan, I attended cons and demoed the game whenever I could. My game design partner was able to attend some that I couldn't and demo the game at a few more as well!

Then I recruited some ambassadors using my social media channels. I found people who were passionate and interested in my game and sent them a full prototype of the game (with near-com-

plete art). I ensured they knew how to play and teach the game, and they were able to demo the game at even more conventions that neither my design partner or I could get to. An email list was always at the table to ensure interested people could be notified when the campaign went live.

Part of the marketing plan involves getting your sample copies made and sending them out to interested reviewers. I started by posting in relevant Facebook groups that would be interested in reviewing this game. I researched each one to see what their reach was and almost as important to me -- their quality of production. After tallying who I wanted to send review copies to, I decided to make fifteen copies of the game (which cost about \$100 each) and sent them to those that I thought made the most sense.

In addition to the Facebook group reviewers, I contacted who I thought were the big reviewers: Man vs. Meeple, Rahdo, Quackalope (not big, but growing fast), GeekDad, and Board Game Spotlight. This is 100% of your marketing plan because if your game is as good as you think it is, then each of these reviewers will be influencers for you. Rahdo is absolutely an influencer if he loves your game. I was fortunate to have a quote from him saying that MIND MGMT was his favourite hidden movement game of all time! Now that's going to get me some backers!

Two months before the campaign is when I started running some competitions with Gleam. Since MIND MGMT was designed by Sen-Foong Lim and myself, I decided to give out all the previous games we've designed together. I did one contest per week and each week I had three of the games we designed as prizes, so three people would win each week. This lasted for four weeks; then, I did one week where we gave away three omnibus volumes of MIND MGMT the comic from Matt Kindt, signed and with original art inside! The final contest ran for three weeks, and the prize was a deluxe edition of the MIND MGMT game, assuming it funded on Kickstarter.

With Gleam, I was able to direct the efforts of everyone to ac-

tions like signing up for my newsletter (always the best since I have them “forever” or until they opt out), clicking the Remind Me button on my Kickstarter preview page, checking out my Facebook, Twitter, YouTube channels, etc. These all helped me grow my base to about 700 followers on each platform before launch. I boosted a few of these Facebook posts with some Facebook ads, but not too much.

While this was all going on I was sending out press releases to anyone who I thought would find this interesting. This didn't cost me any money, but it took some time. I was also fortunate enough to have someone who knew what they were doing contribute their time to send out my press release to even more places that I couldn't reach (as that was his actual job, but he donated his time because he's friends of our artist, Matt Kindt). This turned out fruitful as he got us an article on launch day in the Hollywood Reporter! That was incredible to see!

Starting on the day before launch and running through the entire campaign I also spent about \$1,000 on BoardGameGeek ads. They offer the ability to give them multiple images per size so they can do some A/B testing and use the more effective one.

What is the best Kickstarter campaign page (or pages) you've seen and why?

I really enjoy every campaign run by Roxley and Burnt Island Games. Both have a great art style to the entire page. They're both clean and they have a smooth flow. Everything makes sense as to why it's located where it is. Everything's legible, even on a phone. Both are very transparent in communicating every step of the process, especially after the campaign funds: letting their backers know where the games are in the process every step of the way. Both of the owners are very humble but passionate about their companies, their games, and their backers. It all feels very genuine and you feel proud when you support their games!

What was the biggest mistake you made before, during, or

after a campaign, and how did you overcome it?

For the Fail Faster Playtesting Journal, I didn't know I had to put 'Made in China' on every single journal. I knew it had to be on the box, but I was misinformed about the need for it on every journal. I was fortunate that my shipment to my US fulfillment partner was allowed through, but my Canadian shipment (about half the order as I was keeping all the overstock in my garage!) got stopped and customs wouldn't let it in.

Fortunately, I was using a customs broker who managed to wrangle a deal: If I wrote a letter promising that I would affix a sticker to EVERY journal, indicating that it was made in China, then they would let it through (with a fine as well, of course). I complied and now have weekly stickering parties at my home every time we have a big order!

What's your best advice for someone wanting to run a Kickstarter campaign?

Besides the obvious answer that I'm sure everyone would say, which is to bring an audience with you and don't expect an audience to just appear, I would say to really embrace your theme. If you can make your campaign FEEL as much like playing your game would, then I think you're on the right track.

With the Fail Faster Playtesting Journal, I gamified the process of playtesting in the journal where designers would fill in progress bars whenever they accomplished one of the key behaviours during a playtest. If they did that enough, then they would earn a badge which came in the form of a sticker that they would affix to the cover of their journal. When it came time to put the Kickstarter campaign together I wanted people to have that same feeling of progressing and earning badges.

I thought the stretch goals would be the best way to address this. Instead of just earning more upgrades whenever we hit a dollar amount or a backer number, I had seven or eight progress bars for

all sorts of different things. Some were about subscribing to my email list, some were for backer totals, and a few were based on single-day achievements.

We would all earn badges at certain points on each progress bar and there would be a list of upgrades available and how many badges each one “cost” to purchase. Whenever we collected enough badges to get an upgrade, I would hold a poll using Google Forms and ask people if they wanted to spend it or hold onto it for a bigger upgrade. We did this throughout the campaign and it created a lot of engagement and made the whole experience fun. More importantly, it felt like it was really on-brand with the Fail Faster Journal.

For MIND MGMT, the entire game is full of paranoia and intrigue as agents are trying to capture a recruiter for a criminal organization. In order to create that same feeling in the campaign, I added a secret mission that was totally voluntary.

Backers had to find images of the main villain, the Eraser all over the Internet. Each one would have a different code attached to it. These codes were hidden on other Kickstarter campaign pages of people that were running campaigns at the same time as me, or in all the video and written reviews that existed for the game. So this made some backers go through ALL my content to find all the codes. I said they couldn’t specifically share the codes in the comments section, but they could list where they were located. A group of dedicated backers set up a thread on BoardGameGeek to talk about it and share discoveries.

The game took about a week for them to crack it, but it was even longer before they could do anything with it. Why? Well, when all the codes were decoded (did I mention that in order to decode it they would have to sign up to my newsletter on my website because you got a free decoder for doing so?), they had to figure out the correct order, and it posed a question from the Eraser: To restore MIND MGMT you must find more recruits, but where are they hiding in the training mission on Kickstarter?

While this was going on we were actually playing a game of MIND MGMT during my campaign with everyone! It's a one vs. many game which made it perfect. I would make my move and update the board state, and then people would chime in with comments about their thoughts on the next move. Then every day, the first comment after 4pm PST with #CAPTUREJAY was the move that I would make for them. So they couldn't answer the secret mission question until they finished the game on Kickstarter.

So once it was done, then what did they have to do? They had to go to the Media Kit which was linked to on my campaign page and post the three images on any social media platform and tag @offthepagegames. If 100 people did this, then we unlocked a whole new sealed package for the game -- which was a huge upgrade!

So this helped people really get the feeling of the game just by participating in my campaign. The other benefits were that my comments were going through the roof, which helps keep a campaign hotter on some metrics, and it forced those who played along to consume everything about the game. They had to watch video reviews and scour other relevant sites as well as subscribe to my newsletter. Then finally, I got 100 free social media shares from those that participated! This is how you marry being on-brand to your game while still accomplishing smart goals to help drive your campaign towards success.

How do you deal with the mid-campaign slump?

I think a lot of it comes down to planning in advance. Did you hold back some things that you could release midway through the campaign? Do you have some new reviews, interviews, articles, or news about your game that you could share, even when you're not blazing through your stretch goals?

Also, you could structure your stretch goals knowing that you're coming up to a slower period and lower the amounts needed to unlock them. This requires a lot of planning as you obviously don't want to provide a stretch goal at a level that will lose you money,

but if you were providing stretch goals every \$20k, maybe you can do a few for every \$5k.

Finally, how are you engaging with your backers? Is your campaign just you responding to comments whenever they pop up? I'd recommend ensuring you have plans to keep people engaged and find reasons for people to talk in the comments section throughout the campaign.

For MIND MGMT, we played an actual game of MIND MGMT with everyone contributing their thoughts on the next move in the comments, and the board state getting updated once a day. This ensured there was always activity and things were happening on the page.

While this might not mean your numbers are increasing every day, it does mean you're having more fun with your backers, conversing with them, and ensuring fewer of them cancel because of how fun the campaign is. Find ways to create polls throughout your campaign and have them vote by adding their thoughts in the comments. While more comments do not mean more pledges, I do know that if I see a campaign that is struggling, I can almost guarantee that they have less than 100 comments total.

What's your best advice for creating campaign updates?

1) Have a format or style to all of your updates so they feel like they are part of your campaign. Have some art as your header for your banner - possibly one that you can tweak for each update, to make it feel integrated into your campaign.

2) Plan in advance! Try to space out your reviews and articles so they pop up during your campaign. As long as you have about three videos ready on launch, anything extra can be saved for a couple of days or the following week. This way you'll have something relevant to share with your backers. I made sure the biggest name reviewers were all available on day one, but there were some smaller ones that I held back until week two started. This is also true for interviews or articles. Try to get them done in advance,

but have them hold off on publishing them until mid-way through your campaign. If you're doing live playthroughs, schedule them in advance so you can use an update to remind people when it's happening.

3) Try to be personal and yourself. No one wants to feel like a number in the machine, so say some heartfelt things if that's what you want to say. Thank your backers and let them know how much their support means to you.

4) Updates are a great place to grow the world of your game. Share stories of how it got created, or stories about the world of your game. Introduce us to the characters, the setting, or even give us an actual story set in your world.

5) Leverage your artist. If you're proud of the art for your game, show off your artist by showing some behind the scenes stuff. Can the artist do a live stream of them creating a new stretch goal card? Maybe have the artist do this video in advance so you can show it off during the slump of your campaign.

6) Give them an action. If possible, try to limit each update to only one action like voting on a poll by adding their opinion in the comments, giving a thumb to an image on BoardGameGeek, downloading and using your avatars, or sharing something on their social media feeds. If your update has a list of seven things they can do, they probably won't do any.

7) Pace yourself and don't update more than once per day. You don't want to lose any backers because they're being "attacked" by too many emails from you. I aimed to do an update every other day but would do one in between if we hit a major milestone.

8) Use updates to remind backers which stretch goals have been hit and then go into more details about the next stretch goals that were just announced.

Jeff Beck

Uproarious Games | uproarious.net | @uproariousgames

3	9,056	\$306,510
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Getaway Driver, Word Domination, The Grand Carnival
POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What do you wish you would have known before running a Kickstarter campaign?

I don't think anything can really prepare you for your first Kickstarter campaign. It is such an intense event with fantastic highs and terrible lows. Backers are very passionate, and will absolutely tell you what they think about things, which can be very beneficial but can also be hard to hear at times - especially if you have your heart wrapped up in the game you are promoting.

With that in mind, I really wish I knew how to detach myself from the game I had on Kickstarter. It's important to remember that it's not you on the Kickstarter page; it's just something you helped create. Some people will like it, others may not, and that's ok. That doesn't reflect on your value as a person in any way. Looking at your campaign through that lens can help you maintain a healthy emotional state throughout your campaign, which can be a difficult thing to do.

What makes a game a good product for Kickstarter?

Keep in mind that backers will not be able to play your game before deciding whether they want to part with their hard-earned money. So, it's not enough for your game to be fun. It may be the

most fun game ever invented, but it won't matter because potential backers won't have the chance to try it out.

Instead, your game needs to be the most unique game people have ever heard about. Just describing the game, whether it be the theme or the mechanic, should be enough to hook people because, for most people, that's all they will have to decide on.

Think about the games that sold well in the past year or so and stood out from other games in really big ways. A game about bird watching? That's insane, tell me more. But, if your game is a deck-building game set in a fantasy world of elves and dragons, it won't matter how clever your discard mechanic is, you are going to have a really hard time.

What did the marketing plan look like leading up to your most recent campaign's launch?

Marketing on Kickstarter is all about creating a "buzz" around your game. You need people you have never met to see your game, to engage with your campaign, and most importantly, to talk about it with their friends. Of course, there is no bullet-proof way to ensure your campaign will generate that buzz, but here are two things to start with:

- 1) Get your game in front of as many "tastemakers" as you possibly can. Thankfully, in the board game industry, there are pre-defined avenues to do this: game reviewers. There are hundreds of individuals and outfits that are happy to provide a preview of your game and share it with their followers. And don't be stingy here. Work with several game reviewers to show off your game, targeting a variety of mediums (YouTube, Instagram, podcasts, etc).
- 2) Make sure your game has something worth talking about. What is your hook? What is the one thing your game does that I can't find anywhere else? The stronger and more unique your hook is, the more likely people will talk about your game.

What's your best advice for someone wanting to run a Kickstarter campaign?

This may sound silly (especially to someone who hasn't run a Kickstarter campaign before), but it's very important to remember to have fun. Your campaign is a party that you need to keep bumping the entire time.

When you are having a good time, it will be much easier for your backers to have a good time as well. Let your personality shine through. Depending on the theme and mood of your campaign, let some humor shine through in your video, on your page, and in your updates.

Run creative contests that let your backers get involved. For example, in a previous campaign, we held a contest where backers submitted photos of them cosplaying as characters from the game. It was a small and silly thing, and definitely not every backer engaged with that, but those who did had a really good time, and it helped keep the campaign light and enjoyable.

How do you deal with the mid-campaign slump?

Find some new avenues to talk about your campaign. We usually time our game previews to drop over the course of the campaign, rather than all at once. This helps keep our game in the "dialogue," showing up on people's YouTube feeds, etc. See if you can find a podcast or two to be a guest on. Staying active will help new people find your game during these slow days, and help people who were on the fence jump on.

Finally, and probably most importantly, you need to do everything you can to encourage your current backers to stick with you. Just like mid-campaign slumps, cancellations are a natural part of any Kickstarter campaign, but that doesn't mean you are powerless to let them happen.

Help your backers feel engaged and invested in your campaign. Listen to and implement their feedback. Tease new and exciting

features of your game throughout the entire campaign. Giving backers a reason to stick around will go a long way.

What's your best advice for creating campaign updates?

In our last campaign, we surveyed our backers in nearly every update, asking them about components, colors, and even what stretch goals they wanted to see next. This not only helped decrease the number of cancellations compared to past campaigns, but their feedback ended up being invaluable pointing us in directions that we never would have gone on our own. Everyone is excited about a new game, but if it's a new game that you had a hand in helping shape, it's even more intriguing.

Joey Vigour

Vigour Games | joeyvigour.com | @JoeyVigour

2	8,900	\$334,667
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

GROWL, Chaosmos... The Temple!
POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What did the marketing plan look like leading up to your most recent campaign's launch?

I always get the best art I can afford in advance. I run A/B testing using Facebook ads to see which art is clicked on more and which ad copy works the best. I drive potential leads from Facebook to a prelaunch landing page to grab email addresses. Concurrently, I go to conventions to promote the game. I always take off time from any other plans for the actual launch. I hire a friend or assistant to help me thank all the backers so I can spend my time during the campaign actually doing the work.

How do you deal with the mid-campaign slump?

I try to have stretch goals unlock every single day, and keep lots of mystery and excitement building up to "reveals" during the campaign. It works great - I had 11,000 comments during GROWL because the backers were so engaged!

What's your best advice for the fulfillment process after the game is manufactured?

Use weight-based shipping and plan your shipping based on conservative estimates, including the weight of the box. Remember that most fulfillment companies charge between \$.50 and \$2.00

for each item after the first item, so you may have to build some of that into the shipping prices if certain tiers include multiple items. For a pledge manager, use BackerKit or CrowdOx. I've used both.

If you've run multiple campaigns, what did you do differently and why?

Each campaign, I experimented with different tactics, including different assistants and team members, different marketing companies (if any), and different high-concept ideas. With GROWL I offered 500 copies for free (\$1 with a \$1 discount from shipping), and directed facebook ads (announcing the free game) to the page. Then when enough people in the \$1 tier got excited and moved into a \$20+ tier, I ran more ads on FB announcing that some of the free slots had just opened up. So it was a bit like a cattle chute (except at the end there's a great game waiting!).

Keep trying new things. It may seem scary... but the money you'll save by understanding how different tactics work or don't work will be worth it.

What would you tell someone who just ran a campaign that failed to fund?

You don't know what you are doing. How many email addresses do you have? You need hundreds or thousands of people to know about the project BEFORE you launch. No problem, dust yourself off, and learn how it is done!

John Coveyou

Genius Games | geniusgames.org | @GotGeniusGames

10	29,071	\$1,448,312
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Cytosis, Genotype, Subatomic
POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What did the marketing plan look like leading up to your most recent campaign's launch?

One of the most effective marketing tools a publisher has is their email list. It allows you to directly notify individuals who have already expressed interest in what you are producing. There are many ways to grow your email list. Some methods might attract a lot of people, but what you want the most is people who are interested in what you are making rather than just large numbers of people.

Contact reviewers months in advance and try to get a trickle of reviews and buzz going about the games long before the campaign launches so there is anticipation leading up to the launch.

Write a press release (or contract someone to write one), and send it out to media outlets in your industry at least a week prior to the launch, giving them a little time to think about covering the campaign.

Find and curate relationships with some of the more potent media outlets before sending the press release cold.

Take your product to conventions and let people know they can be notified when it launches if they join your email list. This gets them familiar with the product and allows you to grow your list, like discussed above.

Think about running ads through Facebook once the campaign is fully funded. Paying for eyeballs is not something you want to spend money on until the campaign seems really credible though because people likely don't know who you are. So the campaign needs to speak for itself.

What's your best advice for someone wanting to run a Kickstarter campaign?

Before you launch, I would decide whether you want to run a publishing company and manage all the things that come with running a company, or if you just want to make a product (or a series of products). I had no idea what I was getting into the first time I designed a game and before I launched a campaign for that game. Now, I don't do much game design at all. So if that's what I really wanted to do, I made the wrong decision because most of my time is spent managing production, managing finances, and managing people.

I would also think about what kind of brand you want people to know you for. Think about what you want people to say about your brand one year down the road, two years down the road, five years and ten years down the road. Then, focus on saying no to things that might seem lucrative or fun so you can say yes to the things that fit within the brand you are trying to build.

What's your best advice for the fulfillment process after the game is manufactured?

Start researching and planning your fulfillment process long before you launch your campaign. There are delays embedded at every step of the process, so add some buffer time in as well. I usually assume every time the product changes hands it will take an extra two weeks (e.g. add two weeks once manufacturing ends and the freight company picks up the product, add two weeks once the product arrives at the fulfillment center and shipping starts, etc.).

I think it's best to have a fulfillment center lined up before you launch the campaign and be in communication with them during

the manufacturing process. If you plan to fulfill your campaign with friendly international shipping, you will need to freight products from your factory to international depots. I've found you want to break the shipping regions into five main areas: the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia/New Zealand, and the Rest of the World. Find a good fulfillment depot in each region to ship to those regions.

Joseph Z Chen

Metafactory Games | fantasticfactories.com | @fanfactories

1	4,387	\$160,905
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Fantastic Factories
POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What do you wish you would have known before running a Kickstarter campaign?

Be prepared to answer every possible kind of question, especially around shipping and pledge levels, and be consistent with your answers. For example, there will inevitably be backers who will ask for some kind of group discount. Or they will ask why shipping is so expensive to Switzerland. Or they will ask how they can pledge for 3 copies. And even after the campaign, there will be people late to the party, and they'll ask how they can get the game and if it comes with the Kickstarter promos (and if they don't, they may ask how they can get them). These are just a few examples of questions you'll want to be prepared for in advance and be consistent with your team on how you respond.

What did the marketing plan look like leading up to your most recent campaign's launch?

Once the game was “complete,” I spent about three months exclusively preparing for the campaign. There's a huge list of things to do, but the main task was assembling a list of reviewers and influencers to reach out to. (I had spent the past two years building my network and immersing myself in the community via Twitter, attending conventions, and binging on YouTube videos, podcasts, etc.)

During those three months, I decided how many review copies to assemble, who would be reviewing the game, and where I would be taking the game to build exposure. Through being part of the community, I met influencers and found natural opportunities to put the game in front of them to gather quotes and reviews.

Additionally, I spent some time experimenting and learning the Facebook ad platform -- A/B testing different creatives. I also primed my mailing list by announcing the campaign launch date about a month in advance. Then, the week before launch, I sent out a preview of the campaign page and encouraged people to click the “notify me on launch” button.

What was the biggest mistake you made before, during, or after a campaign, and how did you overcome it?

One of the biggest mistakes I made was not completing 100% of the art and graphic design before launching the campaign. I did all the art and graphic design myself, and I had enough done to launch a good campaign, but I thought that during the campaign I would have time to finish the rest.

I was even unemployed during the whole campaign, but wow, I can tell you that managing an active Kickstarter campaign is basically a full-time job with no set hours. You may think you’ll have a spare moment to easily throw together that stretch goal graphic or polish up the layout on your rulebook, but if you’re doing the art or graphic design yourself, do not expect to have time to do it during a live campaign. After the rush of the campaign, I was so exhausted that it took me longer than expected to complete the remaining tasks, and that led to some of the delays I had fulfilling the game to backers.

What’s your best advice for someone wanting to run a Kickstarter campaign?

Find a partner who ideally has as much stake in the project as you do. Tabletop Kickstarter campaigns often fail right off the bat

because they aren't realistic in their approach. Maybe the art just isn't good. Or the game isn't actually that fun. Or the pledge levels are way too expensive.

When it's your project -- your baby -- it can be hard to see these critical flaws. Most friends and family will be supportive of your project, but in order to have a successful campaign, you need to also convince complete strangers to back your project. You need an equal partner who isn't afraid to tell you that your art sucks or your idea to include a plushy add-on is a terrible one. And at the very least, your partner can help share the weight and load of running and fulfilling the campaign.

How do you deal with the mid-campaign slump?

For the most part, you don't. All the effort you put into building up your game, your audience, and your campaign should have been executed prior to launching. Your momentum and trajectory in the middle of your campaign are almost entirely dictated by the groundwork you laid in advance. Most ad-hoc efforts mid-campaign won't move the needle. For the most part, you should stick with the plan, and just ride out the slump. Any ideas for boosting pledges mid-campaign are better served to make the splashiest and biggest launch day.

That said, the only effort I found noticeably effective was running an AMA (ask me anything Q&A session) on the r/boardgames subreddit, which is something you can't really run until your campaign is well underway. The size of the audience on Reddit is absolutely massive, and I accumulated a significant number of backers from Reddit -- many of whom learned about the game through the AMA.

What's your best advice for creating campaign updates?

Be transparent, and be detailed. Kickstarter is still unique in the way it allows creators to connect with backers. Many backers are in it for more than just the game. They want to be part of the journey,

and sharing that journey with them is a way to build dedicated fans of the game. In a way, you're not just selling a game, but you're selling yourself as a creator and as a brand. Transparency builds trust, and that trust can go a long way in keeping your backers feeling happy and satisfied. The nitty-gritty details might not be for everyone, but the backers who crave it will absolutely love it.

What's your best advice for the fulfillment process after the game is manufactured?

Calculate everything twice and then include a healthy buffer. When a Kickstarter project fails financially, the vast majority of the time it's because the creator underestimated fulfillment costs. You need to consider the rising costs of shipping as well as possible political factors like tariffs.

Everyone thinks about the cost of making the game, but what people don't realize is that for a typical project, the per-unit cost to fulfill the game is MORE than TWICE the cost of actually manufacturing and freighting it. Let that sink in. 2x. You actually have a lot of flexibility in how you price the game itself, but you do not have that luxury with fulfillment. If you mess up that cost, you'll be in a world of hurt, and every backer you get on your project might actually lose you money.

What would you tell someone who just ran a campaign that failed to fund?

The first step is to admit there was an issue with your campaign. I've seen so many creators that are just too bull-headed to admit to mistakes, blame outside forces like timing, and simply launch the same campaign as before. If this happens, seek outside perspective and listen very carefully with an open mind. Identify the issue (yes, there's an issue) before launching again.

Looking to the future, how do you think Kickstarter is going to change? And what can future creators do to adjust?

The bar is being raised every single day. Kickstarter used to be for indie creators, and to a certain extent it still is, but we are in-

creasingly facing well-established publishing companies that are experts at using the Kickstarter platform to sell games. Backers are seeing high-quality games with polished campaign pages. They're also becoming increasingly skeptical of companies delivering on their promises. Campaigns that would have been wildly successful a year ago are struggling to fund in today's climate.

What that means is you can't hide behind the excuse that you are indie or just a team of one or two people. You need to compete on the same level that everyone else is. Unfortunately, that means you will need to invest a non-trivial amount of money for things like high-quality prototypes, video content, art, graphic design, convention presence, marketing, etc to even consider launching a campaign.

In order to stand out, you need to do things either better or differently. As the market grows, there becomes a large enough audience of gamers looking for specialized projects like small box games or roll & write collections. Creators need to either up their game or find their little corner of the market to capitalize on.

Juliana Moreno Patel & Ariel Rubin

Wild Optimists | wildoptimists.com | @EscapeRoomInBox

1	2,353	\$135,429
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Escape Room In A Box: The Werewolf Experiment

POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What did the marketing plan look like leading up to your most recent campaign's launch?

We did a lot more PR than marketing. We reached out to numerous reviewers and bloggers. Not with a form letter, but with a very specific and targeted email that specifically mentioned reviews or articles they had done and why we thought they would enjoy our game. Once the campaign was live and successful, we reached back out to anyone we hadn't received responses from, and some of those then came around.

What's your best advice for someone wanting to run a Kickstarter campaign?

Our best advice is to seek out all of the amazing advice that is already out there. There are so many incredibly helpful articles and groups to be found. Obviously, Jamey Stegmaier has done so much for the community. There are Facebook groups for creators. So spend the time researching and then follow all of that advice.

How do you maintain your health and sanity during a campaign?

Frankly, we didn't. It was NONSTOP during the entire campaign, no sleep, awful eating habits, nonsense. But then we did take a full break in the week or two after.

How do you deal with the mid-campaign slump?

Keep pounding the figurative pavement. Reach back out to blogs, podcasts, and reviewers. Show them your initial success. Reach out to people who already reviewed and loved your game and see if they can put you in touch with anyone else who might like to play it. That's how we ended up in Newsweek - a referral from another blogger.

What's your best advice for the fulfillment process after the game is manufactured?

Amazon! It was a giant pain to deal with but literally half the price of the US Postal service and cheaper than other fulfillment options we looked into. This website is a good starting point: www.boardgamedesignlab.com/amazon

Justin Jacobson

Restoration Games | restorationgames.com | @RestorationGame

3	49,493	\$6,965,980
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Return to Dark Tower, Fireball Island, Stop Thief!

POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What makes a game a good product for Kickstarter?

It's visually appealing. It offers a new experience but with touchstones common to backers' existing games so they can see what it's likely to do and how it's likely to be a new experience. It's not something folks need right away. It's easy to add incremental content to, like extra cards, so it's easy to make stretch goals.

What's your best advice for someone wanting to run a Kickstarter campaign?

Kickstarter is a bad way to build an audience. You need to bring your audience with you.

How do you maintain your health and sanity during a campaign?

Develop a "bank" of canned responses to basic, recurring questions so you can literally cut and paste them when applicable.

How do you deal with the mid-campaign slump?

Certainly, stretch goals can help. Making the campaign shorter so the middle is shorter also helps. But, most importantly, I think having a strong campaign community helps, i.e., lots of positive activity in the comments sections. (For Return to Dark Tower, we

also planned for some humor videos to drop in the middle of the campaign just to keep things fun.)

What's your best advice for creating campaign updates?

Don't feel obligated to do too many. We did one a day during the week but took the weekends off. Just let the backers know when they are going to happen so you can establish expectations.

Looking to the future, how do you think Kickstarter is going to change? And what can future creators do to adjust?

Not significantly. I think any major changes are going to come as a result of some unannounced change to Kickstarter itself, like new rules or features.

Keith Matejka

Thunderworks Games | thunderworksgames.com | @thunderworksgam

7	17,785	\$1,085,057
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

ROLL PLAYER, Dual Powers, Lockup
POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What do you wish you would have known before running a Kickstarter campaign?

How helpful and friendly other Kickstarter creators are. Watch other projects. Ask for advice. Ask for help. There are a lot of people out there that want to see you succeed. Most first projects are funded by family and friends. But be warned, when it comes to project #2, a lot of that support may evaporate. So, don't get too confident when you are getting ready to launch your second project.

What is the best Kickstarter campaign page (or pages) you've seen and why?

What makes a good page changes all the time. I usually look at a lot of different pages, but I try to emulate pages that are selling similar products to mine and that have done exceptionally well. Just search Kickstarter projects that are in your category and sort by most funded. Then try to find ones that are similar to yours.

How do you maintain your health and sanity during a campaign?

- 1) Have a solid plan, and do not deviate without significant thought. Don't get distracted by requests/demands from backers that could put your project at risk.

- 2) Get help from friends to help cover comments and responses to questions.
- 3) Make sure your plan for retailer pledges is well-thought-out and vetted by a friendly local retailer.
- 4) If you're not going to be able to respond to comments for a significant period of time, let your backers know. Often times excited backers will help answer questions in the comments for you.
- 5) If you're doing stretch goals, have them well planned out, but don't reveal too much too soon so you can be flexible as the campaign continues.

How do you deal with the mid-campaign slump?

I try to create opportunities to engage with the backers. Try to get some people generating fan-translated rulebooks. Run some ads. Find some podcasts to appear on. Other than that, just breathe and sit back a little. The slump sucks, but it's part of the process.

What's your best advice for creating campaign updates?

Always include at least 1 picture. After the campaign, I recommend setting a regular pace of minimum once per month and maintain it. That way, backers get a regular sense of progress and dependability. Try to have something of significance to say, but if there's no real progress, there's no shame in saying that. This is common around Chinese New Year. Also, try to be charismatic and relateable, but be clear with the new facts for the project.

Looking to the future, how do you think Kickstarter is going to change? And what can future creators do to adjust?

The gaming audience on Kickstarter keeps getting larger and keeps evolving. Competition keeps getting tougher and tougher. There are more projects launching all the time. I think it will continue in this direction. Currently, there's a lot of love for \$100+ super bling'ed out production games and small \$25 or less titles. The middle ground of \$50-\$60 feels like a harder sale. I suspect

it will continue to move in this direction. Backers want to see finished games that are ready to buy/preorder. A small indie project that still needs a lot of development and artwork will struggle and have a harder time as Kickstarter evolves.

Kirk Dennison

PieceKeeper Games | piecekeepergames.com | @PieceKeeperGame

3	3,802	\$233,353
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Rurik: Dawn of Kiev, Gearworks, Flag Dash
POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What do you wish you would have known before running a Kickstarter campaign?

I wish someone had advised me to really limit my marketing to friends and family. Although my friends and family showed up to help my campaign fund, I felt like a used car salesman afterwards because I focused on quantity over quality.

I should have narrowed my focus to only those I was very close with and should have not reached out to others from earlier stages in life. Ultimately, I felt much better about not monetizing my relationships during my second and third projects as I took a better and more limited approach to informing close friends and family.

How do you maintain your health and sanity during a campaign?

Two practical steps I have taken to reduce stress during Kickstarter campaigns are turning off phone notifications and responding to backer comments and messages during specific time windows. You will drive yourself crazy if you see all the real-time activity, comments, and messages during your campaign.

This can be true with both smaller campaigns – as fewer notifications may imply the campaign is not doing well – and larger

campaigns – as you may be constantly overwhelmed with activity. Regarding backer communications, you will spend less time and energy on comments and messages by replying during dedicated blocks of time each day rather than responding on the fly throughout the entire day.

What's your best advice for creating campaign updates?

It's important to share many details and be transparent with backers, but I would not recommend sharing your real-time first impressions when filming unboxing videos of samples from your manufacturer. It is likely that one or more things will need to be adjusted and you may be caught off-guard by what you find. Instead of floundering through what to say, it is better to record the video without audio and just show off the samples. Then you can present your findings in a measured manner by typing a clear summary with the next steps to resolve any issues.

What's your best advice for the fulfillment process after the game is manufactured?

Adopt a healthy perspective upfront and accept that things will go wrong during the fulfillment process because there are way too many variables outside of your control. You will spend more money than expected, games will be delivered later than you anticipated, and some backers will be disappointed with the condition in which their games arrive.

Here are 3 practical steps to follow:

1) **Roll up your sleeves and do the hard work** (or pay someone to do this for you).

As early as possible, create a fulfillment cost spreadsheet. It should account for the estimated weight and dimensions of each of your products and the associated shipping costs to each country, along with the freight costs, VAT or import taxes, and payment processing fees on the amount you charge for shipping. Plan on a 10-15% increase in shipping prices for the next year.

2) Communicate with partners early and often.

You should get quotes from multiple fulfillment partners in each region of the world and compare the partners based on feedback from other Kickstarter creators, their rates, and their communication. Set appropriate expectations up front and treat your partners well!

3) Budget for everything going wrong.

Add buffer time at each stage of the fulfillment process. In total, expect it to take around twelve weeks from the date your manufacturer says your games will be ready for pickup to backers receiving their games. Moreover, add an extra 5-10% buffer for unexpected costs related to freight and fulfillment (in addition to the 10-15% price increase for next year's shipping costs).

Liberty Kifer

Light Heart Games | lightheartgames.com | [@lightheartgames](https://twitter.com/lightheartgames)

1	2,066	\$42,480
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING
CRYSTALLO		
POPULAR CAMPAIGNS		

What did the marketing plan look like leading up to your most recent campaign's launch?

I didn't spend anything on paid advertising; instead, I used my budget to buy as many prototypes as possible and send them to reviewers and previewers across many forms of media— YouTube, Instagram, blogs, podcasts, etc. I think this approach really paid off as it got the game out there and seen by a lot of people before the campaign launched, while at the same time giving me lots of great reviews to show off on my campaign page!

What is the best Kickstarter campaign page (or pages) you've seen and why?

The campaign page for Moonrakers totally blew me away! They put so much care and time into the graphics and gave the page a really custom feel. Not only did it look stunning, but it was also really well organized and had everything a campaign page should have.

What's your best advice for someone wanting to run a Kickstarter campaign?

Do your homework. Even when it seems like you're ridiculously over-prepared, check that list a few more times. You'll never regret the time you put into learning and preparation, only the time you didn't.

Don't rush yourself. You're not on anyone's deadline except your own. If you're not sure the campaign is 100% ready, push the launch date until you're positive it couldn't be better! Ask for feedback on your campaign and really listen to that feedback. Then, do what your gut tells you is best. And don't forget, this is an adventure! Enjoy it. Expect the unexpected, and be ready to learn as you go.

How do you maintain your health and sanity during a campaign?

For the first few days, you're going to be a mess. I think that's unavoidable, especially if things go really well! There is so much adrenaline and so many things to keep an eye on. Make sure you have the support of family and friends during that crucial time, eat whenever you can, and sleep where possible.

And when things inevitably slow down some, that's when you need to take full advantage and get rested and try to relax. There's not a ton you can do during the slower middle part, so try not to drive yourself crazy checking constantly. Make yourself put down your phone and step away from the computer for periods of time each day. It won't explode or fall apart if you go outside and take a walk for an hour, I promise!

What's your best advice for creating campaign updates?

Definitely write some (at least in outline form) ahead of time and save them as drafts. This is advice I ignored, to my detriment. For updates you can anticipate, milestones like "Fully funded!" and "First stretch goal unlocked!" you can and should rough those updates out before you even launch your campaign. You don't want to be frantically typing one up at 3 am, or at 8 am after 3 hours of sleep—trust me on that. You can always add to the drafts or adjust as needed, but having something to start with will save you so much time and stress!

Marc Neidlinger

Orange Nebula | orangenebula.com | @OrangeNebula

3	24,054	\$2,172,039
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Unsettled, Vindication

POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What do you wish you would have known before running a Kickstarter campaign?

About 43,678 things. Some of them we don't even know now. We're always learning. But one of the most significant lessons in crowdfunding is that you need a crowd to fund. You can't just snap your fingers and expect people to show up. You must gain their trust first, and you do that by telling the truth, keeping your word, and doing the right thing when nobody is looking.

What was the biggest mistake you made before, during, or after a campaign, and how did you overcome it?

Underestimating fulfillment and shipping costs will not only destroy a campaign, but it may also destroy a company. Spreadsheets are your friend. Your BEST friend.

What's your best advice for someone wanting to run a Kickstarter campaign?

Research both the industry and the crowdfunding platform for a full year before diving in. Gah! This may sound heavy, but the number of decisions necessary to make a campaign successful is unending, and most of them won't appear until you're in the middle of the storm. Rushing to launch is a common error and

can often have devastating ramifications. Invest in yourself, your product, your network, your staff, and contractors, and treat every detail like it matters. Because it does.

How do you maintain your health and sanity during a campaign?

Emotions run high during a campaign. Most of them can't be planned for. So we set principles around how we intend to respond before the campaign starts, including what our tone should be in the community and social spaces. How you handle pressure communicates character and builds trust (or destroys it). We lean into each other, both our staff and our community of backers. People come first. Many people will preach this, but few actually practice it.

How do you deal with the mid-campaign slump?

Mid-campaign slumps are the perfect opportunity to create engagement that has nothing to do with backing the project. We use this time to actively engage the backers and social communities with story-driven concepts that actually intertwine with our product. Community-designed promo cards were a starting point for us, but we've moved beyond that to things that reflect our brand.

What's your best advice for creating campaign updates?

Be mindful and concise. Many people don't want all of the details, they want the short version. Give it to those people first, so they can move on, then you can go on with the details for the portion of the community who wants to experience that as well. If we have a long update, we summarize it at the top (when we can). We always, always remind our community how valuable they are and how grateful we are.

If you've run multiple campaigns, what did you do differently and why?

Each campaign has tended to focus more and more on our community—their wants, needs, and feedback. Listening with an open

Board Game Kickstarter Advice

mind leads to insights that you never would have seen coming with a laser-focus on funding only. Customers are not dumb — in fact, they are incredibly smart and perceptive. They'll notice the little things.

Mike Gnade

Rock Manor Games | rockmanorgames.com | @mgnade

9	24,250	\$1,100,803
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Maximum Apocalypse, Lawyer Up, Set a Watch

POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What is the best Kickstarter campaign page (or pages) you've seen and why?

The original Scythe Kickstarter campaign was pretty amazing. It was one of the first big Kickstarter campaigns that I backed. CMON and the Tiny Epic games always have solid pages as well.

What's your best advice for someone wanting to run a Kickstarter campaign?

If you just started thinking about running a Kickstarter campaign, you're about a year away from launching.

If you've run multiple campaigns, what did you do differently and why?

I change things up every campaign. My overall format for a campaign page stays the same, but I always try a few new things with stretch goals or revealing things or rewards or something. Every project is still different.

What would you tell someone who just ran a campaign that failed to fund?

There is no stigma at all to relaunching a campaign! If you believe in your project, stick with it, take the time to regroup, and click that relaunch button when you're ready.

Mike Hinson

Brent Dickman (Elf Creek Games) | elfcreekgames.com |
@ElfCreekGames

3	5,672	\$319,562
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Atlantis Rising, Honey Buzz, End of the Trail
POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What makes a game a good product for Kickstarter?

For board games, the presentation needs to be amazing. I tell people that my goal in development is to turn a game into a product and that starts with making the game beautiful, both artistically and mechanically.

What did the marketing plan look like leading up to your most recent campaign's launch?

We wanted to show off the art on social media and we wanted to make sure Honey Buzz was present at conventions prior to launch. We also lined up previewers that we thought would fit best with the audience we were striving for.

How do you maintain your health and sanity during a campaign?

Do not have your campaign up on a computer screen for the entire length of it. Take some time away from the campaign and go watch a movie, spend time with others, play a game...do something to distract you.

How do you deal with the mid-campaign slump?

During the middle of Honey Buzz, we focused on social media

marketing and also had a few previews launch. There are ways to avoid a major slump, you just have to be willing to put in the work to do it.

What's your best advice for the fulfillment process after the game is manufactured?

If you can, I would recommend having fulfillment centers all over the world. It may cost a little bit, but it will help with fulfilling to the different regions and selling games direct to customers after the campaign.

If you've run multiple campaigns, what did you do differently and why?

The biggest change that we made was out of necessity...for our second campaign (Atlantis Rising) we had to stagger when previews would be released because our prototypes were lost in shipment. I had to drive five hours to get prototypes and then we sent them out, but we only had one video on launch day and that person spent all night working on it because he was at reserve duty the weekend before. We did the same thing, staggering releases, for Honey Buzz and it feels like it was a very good strategy.

Nolan Nasser

Deep Water Games | deepwatergaming.com | @deepwatergames

5	7,712	\$367,151
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Welcome to..., Sovereign Skies, Herbalism
POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What makes a game a good product for Kickstarter?

Anything can be a good game for Kickstarter; it's all a matter of how you frame it. We've run Kickstarters for games, expansions, accessories. It really comes down to the product. For a game, a couple of things come to mind for making a good product on Kickstarter: value proposition and exclusivity.

What was the biggest mistake you made before, during, or after a campaign, and how did you overcome it?

Free shipping, and that was a huge problem, so we tried subsidizing shipping. That also created a massive problem because each time we didn't account for the fact that shipping rates would go up by the time we were fulfilling.

What's your best advice for the fulfillment process after the game is manufactured?

This is one of the most important parts, so preparation is EVERYTHING. Have a plan A, a plan B, AND a plan C. Figure out the quotes on shipping, figure out multiple options for handling international shipping. Make sure you've got an account set up with an ocean shipping broker to get your games across the ocean and through customs. Make sure your warehouse is constantly in the

loop and you know exactly how long it will take them.

MAKE GRAPHICS for the warehouse to help them with picking and packing. Manufacture everything so that it'll be easy for the warehouse to pick and pack.

If you've run multiple campaigns, what did you do differently and why?

Every Kickstarter is different, so we take the lessons we learned about what did and didn't work and apply them to how we can do the next one. We're on our 40th Kickstarter as a team over the last 7 years, and even now we're trying to implement new ideas.

We've also started changing how we approach Kickstarter. It's much less of a platform to fund projects that wouldn't get made anymore, and more of a pre-order system. We're trying to use it as a way to generate excitement about exclusive products we don't really offer anywhere else such as expansions/accessories/promos.

Patrick Leder

Leder Games | ledergames.com | @LederGames

7	55,751	\$4,543,218
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING
Vast, Oath, Root		
POPULAR CAMPAIGNS		

What makes a game a good product for Kickstarter?

A good game will connect with an audience earnestly and authentically. You do not need cutting edge game design or fancy art. Instead, whatever you are making should all work and flow together into a single product.

You can connect by engaging an old experience in a new way, coming up with a new system, or by representing a voice or theme that is underrepresented in the current game market. Your art and any other design that accompanies the game should support your premise and theme and not just look fancy for the sake of looking fancy.

What's your best advice for someone wanting to run a Kickstarter campaign?

Build your audience. Build your audience. Build your audience. You should be confident your project will fund day 1. Get out there and show the game off. Do a Work In Progress thread on BoardGameGeek. Play online. Get it in front of content creators. Don't worry about someone "stealing" your idea; at this point, you are going to get there first.

How do you deal with the mid-campaign slump?

Shorten your campaign and ignore it. In the long run, the slump doesn't matter. Go enjoy a couple of days off and get ready for the wild ride at the end.

If you do want to fight it I suggest:

- Figuring out a fun way to pivot the campaign to get the attention back on the project.
- Playing the game on a stream to attract attention.
- Making some posts on your social media that are fun and not necessarily related.
- Don't panic or over post though; that can actually drive cancellations.

What's your best advice for creating campaign updates?

Keep them concise and honest. Writing an update will remind backers that were on the fence about the campaign. If the content is controversial, you might see a small rise in cancellations from this. But it's fine. If the backers cancel now they won't be dissatisfied backers later.

What's your best advice for the fulfillment process after the game is manufactured?

Fulfillment is very challenging. I cannot say we are even good at it, let alone mastered it. You should make sure to communicate with your backers frequently so they are aware of what is happening and when it is happening.

Use a service like Crowd-Ox, Backerkit, or Pledge Manager to help you manage the addresses. Doing it yourself is very rough. Expect some refunds even late in fulfillment. It's okay as with groups of people this large some people are just bound to have a bad day.

Peter C. Hayward

Blue Beard Entertainment | peterchayward.com | @peterchayward

12	24,497	\$669,235
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Ninjitsu!, Dracula's Feast, Scuttle!

POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What do you wish you would have known before running a Kickstarter campaign?

You will lose money on your first Kickstarter campaign. The more you raise, the more you'll lose.

What makes a game a good product for Kickstarter?

At this point, a good product for Kickstarter is the same as a good product for retail - something that cuts through the noise and has a unique hook and, ideally, a built-in audience.

What did the marketing plan look like leading up to your most recent campaign's launch?

Review copies sent out 6-8 weeks before the Kickstarter launched, plenty of hype on social media, and stretch goals mapped out from day 1.

What's your best advice for someone wanting to run a Kickstarter campaign?

Ask yourself: do you want to run a business? Not "am I okay with running a business", but do you WANT to run a business. If the answer is "no," do not run a Kickstarter campaign.

How do you deal with the mid-campaign slump?

We try to organize “boosts” throughout - links from other popular Kickstarters, trending posts on Reddit, links from our past Kickstarters. Anything that will give us a few dozen or hundred extra backers during what’s generally considered the “dead” period.

What’s your best advice for creating campaign updates?

Have fun! If you’re finding them a drag, that comes through. I make dumb jokes, ask questions, and do whatever I can to make sure that the updates are fun for me to write.

What’s your best advice for the fulfillment process after the game is manufactured?

Get a full sample from your manufacturer, and play a full game with that sample. There’s nothing worse than sending the game out to everyone and THEN realizing it’s missing something.

Ryan Laukat

Red Raven Games | redravengames.com | @RedRavenGame

24	88,268	\$5,817,196
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Sleeping Gods, Above and Below, Near and Far
POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What makes a game a good product for Kickstarter?

It's tempting to follow Kickstarter trends and try to cash in on whatever seems like the latest craze. But the truth is that anyone can do that, and they'll likely have more funds, experience, and resources than you. What you should put on Kickstarter is something that only you can make. Naturally, it'll be something you're passionate about, which is one of the most important things. If you're passionate about it, the backers will be able to tell.

But how do you know if your game is something only you can make? The answer is to think of your game more like a painting or sculpture rather than a toaster. It's easy to throw a few game mechanisms together and slap a farming or city-building theme on it, but that won't turn heads. Make something expressive, a work of creativity that obviously has your fingerprint on it. As long as it exudes quality and polish, you'll likely find success. Those are the kind of products that get people excited (even if they're risky and unusual).

What did the marketing plan look like leading up to your most recent campaign's launch?

I've experimented with announcing a game really early, long before the campaign launches, and announcing a game only a few

weeks before funding begins. Without a doubt, the projects that were announced months (and sometimes even a year) before the campaign were the most successful.

I started talking about my most recent game very early in development. I wasn't afraid that someone would steal the idea because I knew how unique the setting, world, and mix of mechanisms were going to be. This also gave us a lot of time to show the prototype at conventions and on preview videos.

Soon, podcasters were mentioning it, and fans were helping spread the word. By the time the campaign launched, many people had already decided to back without even seeing the campaign page. A good social media presence and focused ads on Facebook helped keep up the momentum throughout the campaign.

How do you deal with the mid-campaign slump?

What I didn't understand when I launched my first campaign in 2011 was how important it is to treat the campaign like a continuous party. You must design the campaign to have something new and exciting almost every day.

Don't reveal everything at once. Hold back some of the best tricks for the middle or the end. If your campaign were a magic show, you'd have the absolute best trick at the beginning and shoot off all the fireworks right off the bat.

The middle of your magic show should reveal secrets and uncover mysteries. In the finale, you give everyone a free book of magic (that they weren't expecting) and then tell them how you did all of your tricks. It's also a good idea to keep the show to a good length (your campaign should be no longer than three weeks).

And then also remember that if people start to yawn in the middle of the show, that's normal. If things slow down, it doesn't mean it's a failure. It'll pick back up. Especially when you give everyone their free book of magic.

What's your best advice for creating campaign updates?

Backers love detailed updates that sound like they weren't written by a corporate team of PR people. Sharing your thought process with backers on every aspect of the project can go a long way.

Why did you decide to design the game the way you did? What were the hardest obstacles to overcome? What choices are you making in the manufacturing and shipping process?

While the campaign is running, I suggest writing two or three updates per week. After that, once a month is perfect. If you post more than that, many backers will tire of the updates and stop reading them. If you post once per month, you'll have something valuable to share.

Sami Laakso

Snowdale | snowdaledesign.fi | @SnowdaleDesign

5	7,910	\$404,902
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Dale of Merchants, Dawn of Peacemakers
POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What makes a game a good product for Kickstarter?

Same things that make any product good. Take your audience into account. Do a little market research, and put yourself in the shoes of the consumers. What kind of people browse Kickstarter? What kind of games do they like? In general, the audience on the platform seems to be either pretty deep into the board gaming hobby or not into it at all. Based on that, the games that tend to do well on Kickstarter are either on the heavier end of the spectrum or lighter party games. There are exceptions of course, but don't count on your project being one.

What did the marketing plan look like leading up to your most recent campaign's launch?

My marketing is planned around these three aspects, listed from the most important to the least: email newsletter, third-party previews, and paid advertising. I do share our campaigns on social media as well, but that's the one channel I've been consciously ignoring the most. There are huge benefits and reach to be gained there as well, but I have limited amounts of time and energy and have decided to concentrate on different channels.

My email newsletter is something I value greatly and aim to grow each and every day. It's one of the most direct forms of contact I have to my customers. The first thing I recommend doing with any project is to set up a sign-up form for a newsletter and start collecting contacts.

For the previews, contact the content creators you'd like to preview your game well ahead of time. Remember that it's a two-way street – you're giving them content to cover and they're giving your project visibility. Be ready to help them as much as they're willing to help you.

I budget for marketing on a few board game-related websites. This can include advertising, sponsored coverage, and giveaways. Work with the sites and figure out what would be the best way to partner up with them.

What was the biggest mistake you made before, during, or after a campaign, and how did you overcome it?

My biggest learning experience comes from the campaign for Dawn of Peacemakers. I didn't realize beforehand how hard of a sell that game was. It is highly unconventional in many aspects, including the theme, game mechanics, and even the fact that it has hidden components while still not being a legacy game. The game had quite a few elements that were hard to convey in the short time people usually give each project before making a decision to either back it or not.

At first, I tried to highlight each aspect of the game equally, muddling the message and making it harder to get excited about the product. My solution to the problem included streamlining the marketing of the game, focusing on the peacemaking theme, making it the hook that gets people interested. After that, it's easier to tell them about other things in more detail.

The lesson here is to play to your strengths. Get people interested with the best and most interesting thing you can offer. Start with a bang and continue from there!

What's your best advice for someone wanting to run a Kickstarter campaign?

Do your homework. Research a lot of campaigns, both successful and unsuccessful ones, and try to understand what worked and what didn't. Why did one campaign succeed while others failed? Look at past campaigns from popular creators. How did their first campaign look? Did all their projects flourish? Try to learn from those that came before you.

Participating in campaigns is another great learning opportunity. Read pages and updates, make comments, and take part. That way you'll learn what you'd like to see in a campaign as a backer and can use that experience when you finally launch your own and stand on the other side.

How do you maintain your health and sanity during a campaign?

A lot of this comes down to preparation. If you have handled contacting the factory, fulfillment centers, and different media outlets before the campaign starts, you can concentrate on building a community with the backers during it. Still, it's going to be hectic and time-consuming. If you have a full-time job, it definitely won't hurt to take a couple of days off if you can, especially during the launch and the end of the campaign.

How do you deal with the mid-campaign slump?

First of all, accept the fact that the first and last days of your campaign will generate the lion's share of your project's funding, there's simply no way around that. With that in mind, you can still get the most out of the days in the middle with proper planning. Remember that the number of those more silent days is also directly affected by the length of your campaign.

Various backer activities can keep your project page lively. I like to take suggestions and include polls that affect the game in some manner. Backers often have nice ideas for the game that you didn't

even think about. Creating a stimulating and supportive environment where voices of the players are listened to can lead to a friendly community around your games. Keep in mind, however, that when all is said and done, you're the one responsible for the end product, not your backers. Listening to the feedback and having your own vision for the game are important things to balance.

Finally, contact different media outlets and try to get at least some of them to cover your campaign at different times. This helps bring fresh eyes to your project during the whole campaign and gives each article and preview better visibility when they're not all released at the same time on your launch day.

What's your best advice for the fulfillment process after the game is manufactured?

Start planning the fulfillment before the manufacturing and even before the campaign. Box size and weight greatly influence the shipping costs – something that you really want to take into account well in advance.

Depending on the size of your project, I recommend taking the time to get pricing quotes from a few different fulfillment centers as well as to consider fulfilling the games on your own. It all really depends on the scale of your project. If you're sending out hundreds of games or more, I would definitely consider hiring a fulfillment company to do the work for you.

If you've run multiple campaigns, what did you do differently and why?

In each campaign, I try to come up with ways to interact with the backers. Polls are one of my favourite ways to do that. Lately, I've started experimenting with streaming as well.

One large change is that I've stopped using stretch goals. When I create my games, I design them as whole packages. Designing around stretch goals can have a negative impact on the final product if a part was created with the option of it being cut because of

an unmet stretch goal. This could be solved by either canceling an already funded project with some unmet stretch goals or by unlocking the final goals for free at the end of the campaign. I don't want to do either which is why I made the decision to drop stretch goals altogether. I might use them again in the future if I can come up with a better way to do them.

Scott Gaeta

Renegade Game Studios | renegadegamestudios.com | [@PlayRenegade](https://twitter.com/PlayRenegade)

7	16,756	\$1,766,079
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Power Rangers, Scott Pilgrim Miniatures the World,
Terror Below

POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What did the marketing plan look like leading up to your most recent campaign's launch?

It's extensive and begins three months prior to launch in most cases. In some cases up to a year building community.

What's your best advice for someone wanting to run a Kickstarter campaign?

Only do it if you can afford the risk. Kickstarter is not a guaranteed platform for success. You need to have some funds to invest in your own success. Things like marketing can make all the difference. Make your entire game, on paper, before you launch. Be ready to wrap up the last 20% when the campaign ends and goes to press. That's the best way to avoid mistakes that will surprise you later when it's too late.

How do you maintain your health and sanity during a campaign?

It's a full-time process if your campaign is doing well, so as long as you have that time to devote to it, it's not unlike any other work-day. Make sure you are prepared for the time it will take. Bring on help, and take time off from your day job if you have to. But make it your focus. If your campaign is well thought out and your

pre-marketing was going well, you can expect to be busy. If your pre-marketing is not getting a response, postpone and regroup.

What's your best advice for the fulfillment process after the game is manufactured?

Don't undercharge for shipping. Shipping is a serious cost that you can't absorb and be viable long-term. Be ok with losing the backer who says they don't want to pay shipping.

Also, don't set unrealistic expectations. If you're new to making a game, it's going to take longer than you think. If your print run is small it's going to be a lower priority at your factory. Hire someone who understands shipping and logistics before you launch your campaign. Don't try and figure it out afterwards. It's too late to make changes by then.

If you've run multiple campaigns, what did you do differently and why?

Over time we have become less interested in stretch goals and lean more towards putting everything in the game we want from the start. It's a trade-off of upfront honesty for ongoing excitement. Some people have a hard time grasping that concept and do prefer the stretch goal experience. Instead, we've tried to fill that space with reveals and content that shows off the game over the length of the campaign.

Looking to the future, how do you think Kickstarter is going to change? And what can future creators do to adjust?

I think it will continue to be crowded, but more campaigns in our space will not fund. Consumers are blessed with overwhelming choice and your game really needs to stand out.

Shem Phillips

Garphill Games | garphill.com | @garphillgames

12	35,168	\$4,270,366
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Viscounts of the West Kingdom, Paladins of the West Kingdom, Architects of the West Kingdom

POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

How do you maintain your health and sanity during a campaign?

Being prepared is the best thing. Although, for a first-time creator, it's really hard to know exactly how to be prepared. It's important to know what your expectations are. Think about worst-case and best-case scenarios. How will you manage each of those?

For my first campaign, I constantly felt a week late. I was struggling to keep up with all the questions and comments. I was rushing to prepare new images for updates and stretch goals on the fly.

Don't be afraid to keep your campaign simple and streamlined. Backers will always demand more, but they'll do that even if you have 500 minis packed into your little card game. Believe in what you're creating and others will too.

What's your best advice for creating campaign updates?

Keep them short and to the point. There's nothing worse than getting a wall of text from a Kickstarter campaign. I also plan out all my updates before the campaign goes live. For our more recent campaigns, I would do an update every 2-3 days. I mapped out exactly what the update would highlight - often spotlighting certain elements of the gameplay or design process. If we were running

live streams throughout the campaign, we would also factor these into the updates - linking to a replay of the last one and advertising the next.

What's your best advice for the fulfillment process after the game is manufactured?

Get it sorted before the campaign goes live. Talk to other Kickstarter creators from your area. What did they do, and can they offer any recommendations? Most countries will allow you to import goods, so long as you fill out a few papers and pay the customs fees. However, US Customs only allow US entities to import goods. So, if you're not from the US, you'll need someone to act as your ultimate consignee. Most fulfillment companies are not willing to do this either. This is an example of why I recommend talking to others from your area.

If you've run multiple campaigns, what did you do differently and why?

The biggest change I made more recently was to stop using stretch goals. They just seemed so fake to me. Their main purpose is to build hype and to keep backers interested. But in reality, they slow down the pre-production process, build a culture of "give me more," and leave you feeling stressed or that you're not doing enough for your backers.

I understand that they are necessary for games with a lot of minis - those tooling costs are extremely high. But for a card game, or a more simple Euro-style game like I generally do, they aren't needed. I decided to just make the best product possible, within my budget, and have everything "upgraded" from day one.

However, you then have to be creative with how to fill the missing "hype" that stretch goals usually create. We opted for interesting, regular updates and live streams to keep our backers engaged. Our campaigns continue to grow and we've managed to create our own backer culture, rather than conforming to what is expected from

most Kickstarter creators. And I'd have to say, our campaigns have a much more positive comments section than others I've seen.

Looking to the future, how do you think Kickstarter is going to change? And what can future creators do to adjust?

I think we will see more established publishers moving away from Kickstarter in favour of pre-order campaigns. Kickstarter is a great marketing tool, but sometimes that hype can be more of a negative, than a positive. I am certainly finding that I would rather just go straight to print and avoid all the extra work involved with running a campaign and keeping backers in the loop for 6-8 months. Hopefully, this will help to create more space on the platform for first-time publishers and designers.

Stephanie Kwok

First Fish Games | firstfishgames.com | @firstfishgames

3	3,188	\$140,796
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Get Off My Land!, Town Builder: Coevorden, Ducks in Tow
POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What makes a game a good product for Kickstarter?

This is definitely something we learned about on our most recent campaign. Ducks in Tow visually looks like a game meant for kids, but it actually has more strategy and depth than people expect, and this is not something you can show from the thumbnail on the Kickstarter browse page.

I feel like we may have lost a lot of eyes on the project due to the fact that just from the thumbnail image alone, it looked like a kids' game. After showing it at conventions, we realized that "Aha!" moment we get when we show the game in person is not something easily portrayed through images on the campaign. Some people say family games don't do as well on Kickstarter, which may be true, but there are definitely some very impressive and successful family-style games that blew that theory away.

What did the marketing plan look like leading up to your most recent campaign's launch?

If I could re-do my last campaign, I would have waited longer to launch, instead of worrying about having the game to sell at the next year's conventions. This was a very poor decision in hindsight as this game had no big convention presence during its development.

The decision to launch at a certain time due to shipments arriving in time for convention season made the development and polishing time very short compared to most games. The campaign didn't do as well as we thought it would due to a few reasons, not just a rushed deadline, but rushing was definitely a major reason, and it goes against what we always tell new creators. Don't rush.

What is the best Kickstarter campaign page (or pages) you've seen and why?

There are a lot of amazing artists and creators who have done breathtakingly beautiful work. When we launched our very first campaign, we looked at The Grimm Forest and Santorini campaigns a lot for reference. Druid City Games (Skybound) and Roxley Games are two extremely strong bases that I love and follow and am constantly inspired by. Their campaigns are always loaded with gorgeous artwork and clean graphic design, easy on the eyes, and very captivating to the viewer. It's no wonder their campaigns are always explosively successful.

What's your best advice for the fulfillment process after the game is manufactured?

Contact fulfillment companies ahead of time and let them know your estimated shipping dates. This helps them slot you in tentatively to make sure they have the capacity for your shipment when the time comes. They really appreciate this heads up, and you can start a good working relationship with them early.

Shipping costs are the one thing people underestimate. We always give ourselves a large buffer for shipping estimates, but the final costs are almost always higher than we anticipated. Make sure you get pricing charts from every fulfillment company so you can do proper calculations of how much you should charge for shipping.

If you've run multiple campaigns, what did you do differently and why?

Every time we run a new campaign, we tell ourselves “we’ll be fully prepared” or “no need to rush the launch date,” but things don’t always go as planned, do they? Each time we’re preparing to launch, there’s a checklist of things that must be done before we launch. This includes things like pre-marketing, review videos, intro video, and all the art assets needed to make the campaign page look professional.

We are a small, three-person team, and without financial capabilities that a lot of bigger companies have, we end up doing a lot of things on our own. We make sure we make a list of things that need to be done, by what date, and follow the schedule as best we can to make it a smooth launch.

Two of us are artists, so we have the art assets covered, but none of us have strong marketing skills so we definitely lack a bit on that end. We try our best to have ads running before and during the campaign, but we are not very outgoing or salesmen-like, so it’s very hard for us to self promote pre-campaign. This is something we have thought about after every campaign we’ve finished, and we seriously consider hiring someone next time to help us with what we are weak at, even though funds are tight as is. You gotta do what you gotta do.

Steve Finn

Dr. Finn's Games | doctorfinns.com | @DrFinnsGames

12	6,817	\$267,021
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

The Butterfly Garden, Cosmic Run, Cosmic Run: Rapid Fire
POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What was the biggest mistake you made before, during, or after a campaign, and how did you overcome it?

The biggest mistake I've made involved the pricing of international shipping. How to ship games to backers outside the U.S. is consistently the hardest issue to crack. A major problem for me is that I consistently only get about 500-700 backers for each of my campaigns and, of those, only about 50-200 are outside the U.S. Since this is such a small number, it is very hard to offer duty-free shipping because it usually means you'll be sending a small batch of games to a fulfillment center or multiple fulfillment centers.

That said, the small batch of games can be very expensive to ship. For example, if I have only 50 backers in the E.U., I have to ship those 50 games to an EU fulfillment center and that could easily cost \$5 - \$10 per game to ship and another \$2-\$4 in VAT charges. This is before shipping it to the backers.

To offer duty-free shipping, you need to be sure you'll attract enough backers to make it work. Before offering duty-free shipping, people told me that offering it would be a huge benefit because I would greatly increase the number of non-U.S. backers, but it didn't.

So, now I will be trying a new path, which is to Kickstart a whole line of games. In May of 2020, Dr. Finn's Games will launch a campaign for my 2021 line of games (which will have 4 titles). Hopefully, by combining the exporting of all four games I can increase the quantity enough to make the shipping cost per unit decrease.

How do you maintain your health and sanity during a campaign?

I find running a campaign is not very stressful if planned out well. Make sure that the campaign page has all the correct info and that the reward levels are accurate. I once made an error in setting the shipping price, so many backers did not pay as much as they should, so I had to quickly limit the level and then create a new one.

Thus, it helps to launch at a time when you are not busy with other events in your life in case you need to make quick changes. One thing to stay sane is to selectively disregard feedback from backers (or, politely explain why you are not implementing it). Some backers will provide a lot of good feedback, but many backers simply don't understand the work that is involved.

For example, someone might suggest that you change the box size. For me, the box size is the first thing that I set, and it basically determines the size of the board, punchboards, artwork, etc, so it cannot be changed easily. In my first few campaigns, I had a tendency to want to please everyone, but you can't. So recognizing this is important for maintaining sanity.

If you've run multiple campaigns, what did you do differently and why?

I've had over 20 successful Kickstarter campaigns and have done many things differently. At this point, I have given up on offering stretch goals. For 15 campaigns or so, I experimented with different stretch goals—different types of goals and at different financial levels. Backers continue to insist that introducing certain kinds of goals will be a real draw, but they never really worked for me.

I believe it is a psychological game, in a way, that I refuse to play. I try to put all the quality into the game I am trying to fund. I believe it is disingenuous to add extra cards, and the like, because it just means that those cards were probably just part of the base game and then removed.

This makes it easy for me to project costs, but also I think it's more honest. Whether it actually impacts my funding is to be seen, but I continue to reach the same general levels each time. That said, I started making "promo packs" because I do recognize that Kickstarter backers deserve something special for providing their support in advance. I recognize there is a tension between this and my view on stretch goals. That said, I usually try to have my promo packs be small variants to the game that add a small level of variety so that people who buy the game at retail do not feel like they are missing out. I also offer the promo packs for sale, so they are not exclusive for Kickstarter (just free for backers).

What would you tell someone who just ran a campaign that failed to fund?

There are many wise people who have pointed out the importance of failure for growth and learning. So I view failure as a positive thing unless it means you've wasted time and money that you cannot really afford. That said, before launching a Kickstarter campaign, I believe it is helpful to anticipate failure insofar as you need to be certain that you can afford to fail.

If your project ends up failing, can you afford to lose the time and money you invested? If so, failure is a very positive thing because you can learn whether you have a product that is desired. If your funding goal is \$10K, but you raise \$375, this tells you that your idea is probably not a good one and no amount of revising it will resurrect it.

On the other end, if you reach 50% of the \$10K goal, you can see that there is interest. If so, you'll be getting feedback from backers (and others) on all sorts of ways to improve both the game itself and the Kickstarter campaign page.

Ted Alspach

Bezier Games | beziergames.com | @beziergames

12	35,598	\$3,307,353
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Suburbia, One Night Ultimate Vampire,
One Night Ultimate Alien
POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What's your best advice for someone wanting to run a Kickstarter campaign?

Overprepare. Line up stretch goals for a best-case scenario, and make sure that you can afford them. Triple check shipping prices and add 20% to them because shipping prices might change by the time you ship. Give yourself a sizable buffer (2+ months) for shipping; think of everything that can go wrong, how much that will delay you, and then add two months to that.

How do you deal with the mid-campaign slump?

Expect it, keep the updates going, and know that there will be a big jump at the 48-hour mark. The mid-campaign is a great time to invest in advertising to make that slump less slumpy.

What's your best advice for creating campaign updates?

Make them interesting to the backers, not necessarily to you. While getting to a backer number milestone or a revenue milestone is super exciting for a creator, most backers don't care that much (huge milestones like \$1 million or 10,000 backers might be the exception). Tell them in-depth details about game elements, Easter eggs in the artwork, or other things to make them feel special.

What's your best advice for the fulfillment process after the game is manufactured?

Be careful when signing up with pledge managers, as there are a multitude of fees that can add up very quickly.

Tim Eisner

Weird City Games | weirdcitygames.com | [@WeirdCityGames](https://twitter.com/WeirdCityGames)

3	6,298	\$290,789
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

March of the Ants
POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What makes a game a good product for Kickstarter?

I think projects that have a strong narrative element do really well on Kickstarter. As potential backers are usually unable to play the game themselves, it helps to have a theme and components that draw backers in and allow them to imagine all the cool and fun stuff they will do when they play the game.

Good artwork is also king in this regard as it helps give an idea of the experience of the game. I think games with unique or interesting themes can do well on Kickstarter as they stand out a bit from the multitude of games being released each year.

What did the marketing plan look like leading up to your most recent campaign's launch?

I am currently in the planning phase and will purchase an ad package on Boardgamegeek.com, book 4-7 reviews/previews across different mediums (written, video, podcast), demo at local conventions leading up to launch, and do giveaways in Facebook groups dedicated to board games.

What's your best advice for someone wanting to run a Kickstarter campaign?

Assemble a solid team that will support you throughout the process. A Kickstarter is an enormous endeavor and can be very stressful. Even with the best team, it will be overwhelming and intense, but trying to run one on your own is a huge undertaking.

How do you maintain your health and sanity during a campaign?

I make sure to stock up on lots of nutritious food and snacks that I enjoy. I communicate with my team a lot to check in on all of our mental health. I try to exercise every day. It is draining no matter what, but keeping your body healthy and moving is important.

What's your best advice for the fulfillment process after the game is manufactured?

It is extremely important to vet your fulfillment partners to make sure they are reliable and have a proven track record. It is tempting to go with the cheaper options to save money, but in my experience, you end up spending as much money or more and take on a ton of stress when you use less reliable partners.

Victoria Cana

Cat Quartet Games | catquartetgames.com | [@victoriacana](https://twitter.com/victoriacana)

1	3,444	\$96,526
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS	TOTAL BACKERS	TOTAL FUNDING

Gladius
POPULAR CAMPAIGNS

What did the marketing plan look like leading up to your most recent campaign's launch?

In order to achieve my goals, I like to look at successful people who started from a similar position with similar resources as me. In the case of Gladius, Alex and I were brand new game designers and Kickstarter creators with a limited budget, so we looked to indie games made by first-time creators: Fire Tower, Someone Has Died, Chai, and Fantastic Factories.

All of these games spent several years marketing their games while playtesting and iterating on their designs, so that's what we did. We demoed Gladius at over thirty gaming conventions ranging from big cons like Gen Con and PAX, to smaller cons like Dragonflight and Metatopia.

We spoke on panels at those conventions to build our brand as game designers and promote our game. We won indie design contests and were selected for several indie game showcases like Boston FIG, PAX South Tabletop Indie Showcase, and Seattle Indies Expo.

And most importantly, we built a Gladius community and email list along the way. When we finally launched our game on Kick-

starter three years later, we had a strong community of backers eager to support the game on day one, so we hit our \$8k funding goal within a few hours and ended the campaign with over \$96k and 3,400+ backers.

What was the biggest mistake you made before, during, or after a campaign, and how did you overcome it?

My number one rule during the Kickstarter campaign was to not commit to anything we couldn't deliver or that would lead to financial complications. For example, if you commit to unplanned stretch goals, they can potentially delay your production timeline or add to the weight of your product, which makes shipping more expensive.

I made a mistake during the Kickstarter by hastily jumping into some agreements like getting game translations and hiring an editor prematurely. My partner was also driven by a desire to “feed the beast” (a.k.a. excited fans on Kickstarter), so I made the mistake of adding a Kickstarter promo card that put us one card over the card printing limit (luckily we were able to reconcile this later with some strategic graphic design changes). These mistakes cost us money and time.

When we run Kickstarters in the future, I'll make sure to not let the pressure of feeding the beast cloud our judgment or make us rush into making decisions.

How do you deal with the mid-campaign slump?

We were able to mitigate the mid-campaign slump for Gladius by doing a lot of promotion: demoing at cons, doing board game podcast and video interviews, getting featured in articles, posting on social media, sending reminder emails to our email list, and running Facebook ads.

The important thing to remember is that the mid-campaign slump is unavoidable. All you can do is try to build as much momentum as possible during the first two to three days of your cam-

paign and then mitigate the slump with promotional activities.

Looking to the future, how do you think Kickstarter is going to change? And what can future creators do to adjust?

Kickstarter gets more and more competitive each year. A game that blew their funding goal out of the water two to three years ago might not be as successful in the current Kickstarter environment. Since the quality and quantity of games launched on Kickstarter has increased rapidly over the years, it means that creators have to create better and better products to stay competitive.

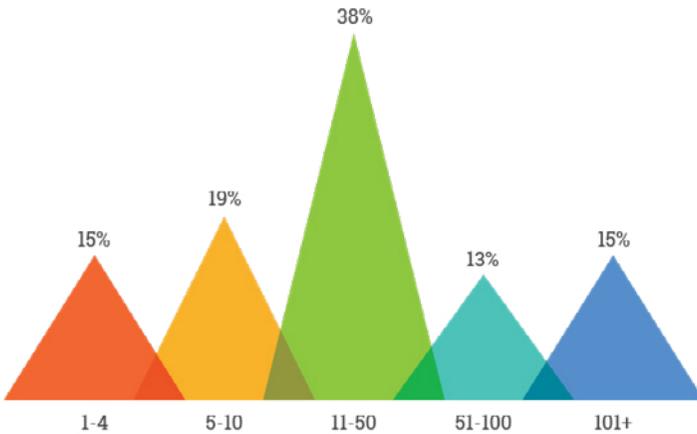
This means your game needs to BE good, LOOK good, have a pre-established audience, and actually fill a gap in the market. If you have a great game but the art, product photos, or Kickstarter page look mediocre, you're going to have a hard time doing well on Kickstarter. If you have a great game, but it doesn't fill a gap in the market, people might pass on backing it since they already have similar or better games in their collection.

Chapter 2: **Backer Survey Data and Analysis**

The best way to know what your customers want is to ask them directly. So, through this survey, I was able to ask a little over 1400 Kickstarter backers what they think is important and what they want most from a Kickstarter campaign.

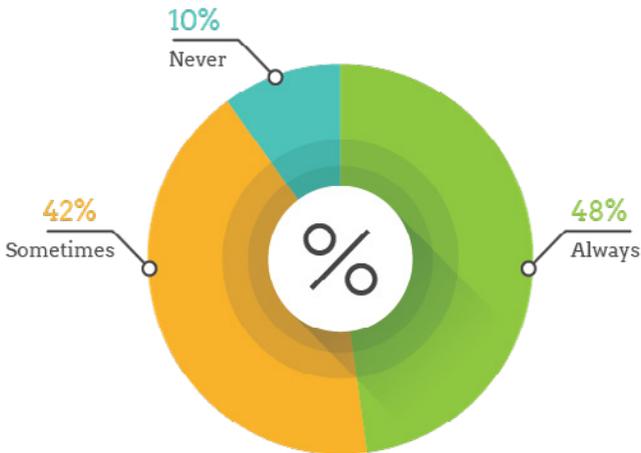
Below, you'll find the data from the twenty-five questions I asked and some brief analysis on what to take away from the results.

1. How many projects have you backed?



Based on this data, you can see that most of the people who took the survey have backed quite a few games. These are people who are very familiar with Kickstarter as a platform.

2. How often do you watch the main campaign video?

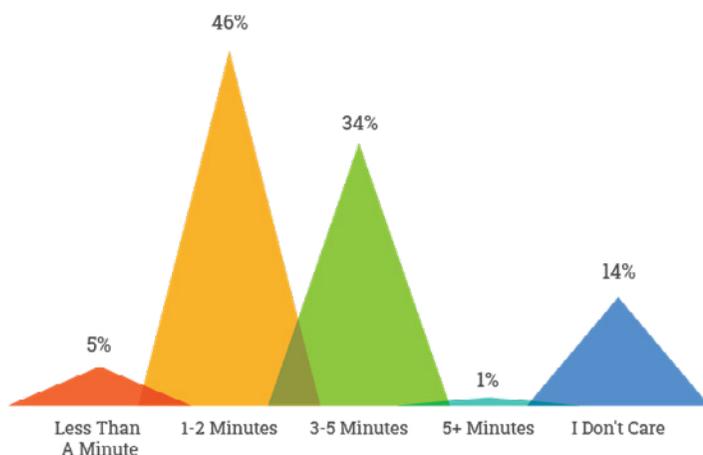


The main video at the top of your campaign is obviously important. (Kickstarter will tell you that 80% of successful projects have a

video.) But yet, over half of backers only watch these videos sometimes or not at all.

This is something to think about before sinking a ton of money into the video. That money may be better spent on a different aspect of your campaign. However, if you have a subpar video, it automatically suggests to backers that you may also have a subpar game. So, it's really about balance. You want to spend just enough to hook people in and show them how great your game is but not so much that you're neglecting other important things.

3. How long should the main campaign video be?



There's a pretty strong consensus here: Definitely keep the video under five minutes, and keep it under two minutes if at all possible. People have a tendency to scroll through Kickstarter campaigns very quickly, so you have a very limited amount of time to turn them into backers.

Make sure you get right to the point. Don't waste the first ten seconds of your video with an animation of your logo. If there's anything in it that's even the slightest bit erroneous, you may want to cut it.

4. What should the main campaign video contain? (multiple answers)



Here's another question with some pretty obvious takeaways. The main things people want to see are the game's basic details and how it plays. If it's a game for 3-6 players, tell them that as soon as possible. And whether it's through digital graphics or a video of you moving cards around, potential backers want to get a feel for how the game works.

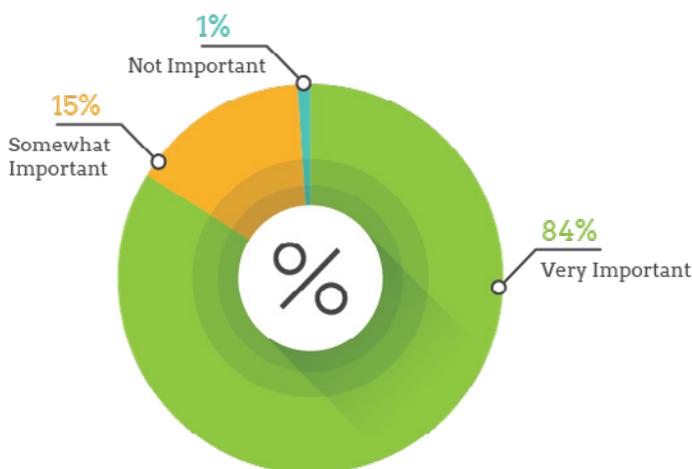
You obviously don't have time to show everything about how your game plays (unless it's a really quick game), so just focus on the high-level explanation, and make sure to emphasize the best parts of the experience your game provides.

A lot of people also enjoy being drawn in by lore and world-building, so if you can weave those things into the overview and basic facts, you'll have a video that appeals to a large group of possible backers.

5. How important is it for a campaign page to have an image showing all the components in the game?

Basically everyone agrees that it's important to have an image that highlights everything that comes in your game. Backers want to know exactly what they're getting for their money, and whether creators like it or not, people tend to compare the components to

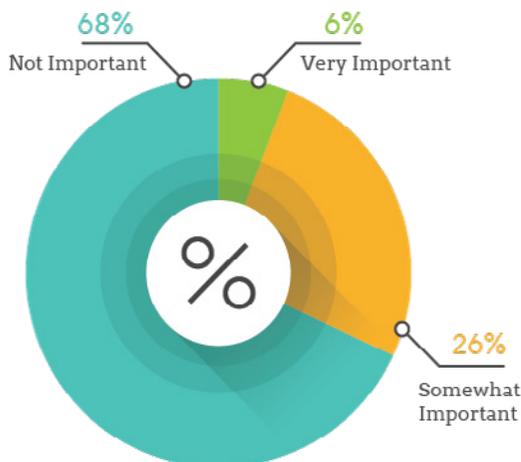
the price and make a snap judgment about if it's worth it.



Typically, you want to put this image right at the top of the page. Don't make backers have to scroll too far to find it. Again, they're looking at it and the reward tier prices, so if you put them side-by-side, it means they can process the information with less hassle.

And since this image is so important to backers, you want to make sure it has some really attractive images and graphic design.

6. How important is it for a campaign to have a print-n-play option?

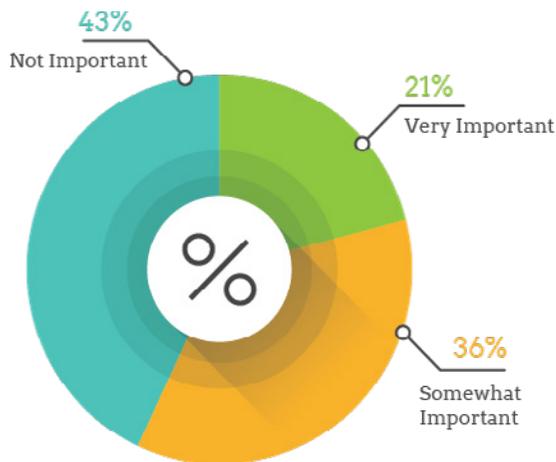


The print-n-play community has grown by leaps and bounds over the last few years, but it's still a pretty small subset of gamers. You definitely won't lose any backers by offering a PnP, and there's a good chance you'll pick up a handful of supporters, so there's really no reason not to include it as an option.

Many campaigns offer a free downloadable PnP version of the game that's often a scaled-down or streamlined example of the cards, boards, components, etc, and you'll get a decent percentage of people checking it out. A lot of them will just download it to see what everything looks like, but some will actually take the time to print everything out, put it together, and play it.

If you do decide to have a print-n-play option, make sure your files look good and are easy to actually print out and put together. To find out the best practices for this, you can check out the podcast episode I did with PnP Grand Master Martin Gonzalvez here: www.boardgamedesignlab.com/martin

7. How important is it for a campaign to have a solo mode option?



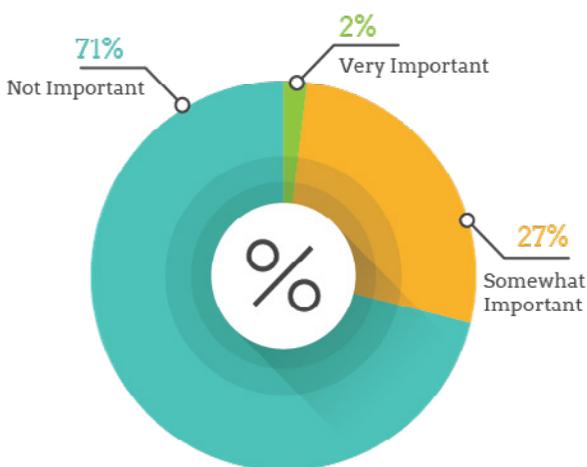
The solo community has grown a ton in the last several years, and based on these numbers, over half of backers are open to playing

your game by themselves -- assuming the solo mode is actually fun.

Single-player modes have developed a fairly negative reputation for being tacked on afterthoughts, so you definitely want to show backers how it works and prove to them it's at least close to as good as the multiplayer game. A video and rules document showcasing how the solo game works will go a long way here.

A lot of campaigns offer solo play as a stretch goal, but this has a tendency to make solo gamers think it's not any good. If you truly have a fun solo mode for your game, it looks a lot better to have it inside the box from the beginning. And if you don't have a fun solo mode, there's no shame in not trying to shoehorn one in.

8. How important is it for a campaign to have a digital version for you to check out? (Tabletop Simulator, Tabletopia, etc)

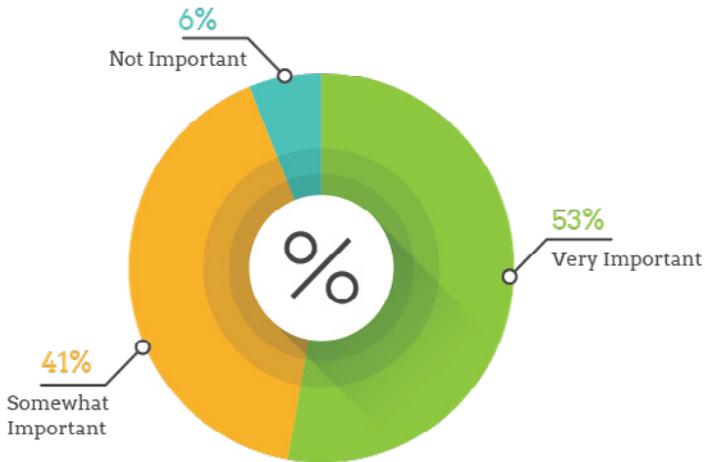


Tabletop Simulator and Tabletopia are wonderful tools to play-test your game or play it online, however, based on the data, if you're not already skilled at creating a digital version of your game, it may not be worth the time to figure it out

This is another situation where you won't lose backers by offering a link for people to see the game on a digital table, and a certain

percentage of people will definitely check it out. But your time may be better spent in other places leading up to launch.

9. How important is it for a campaign to have reviews/previews?



The bottom line is that backers want to see more people than just you talking about your game. Most people have go-to Youtube channels and websites that they trust for information about Kickstarter games, and even if they know it's a paid preview, having a video and/or testimonial on your page from someone they trust will go a long way in getting them to back your game.

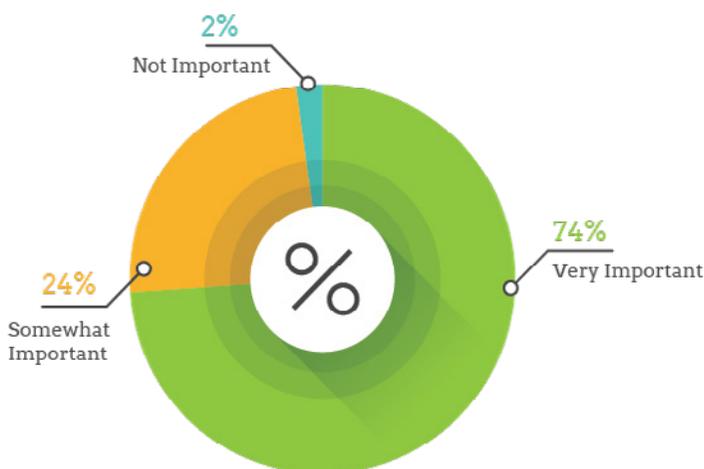
I recommend having at least three review/preview videos if you can, and having more is even better. Not only does it build trust with potential backers, but it also acts as a marketing tool to get your game in front of more people.

You can find a lot more details about reviews and previews in chapter 8.

10. How important is it for a campaign to have a gameplay overview video?

If your campaign page doesn't have a nice, clean, and streamlined

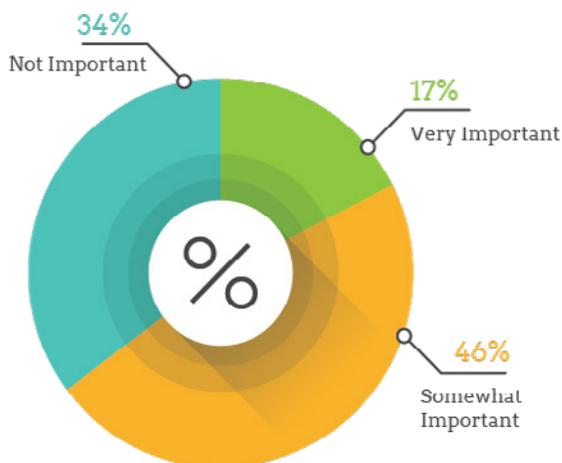
gameplay overview video, you're leaving a lot of money on the table. Many people won't even think about backing a game if they don't have a relatively good understanding of how the game plays.



If you're going to produce this video yourself, make sure you at least look like you know what you're doing. But honestly, this is an area where you may want to hire a professional. It's just that important.

You can learn more about this in chapter 9.

11. How important is it for a campaign to have GIFs showing gameplay?

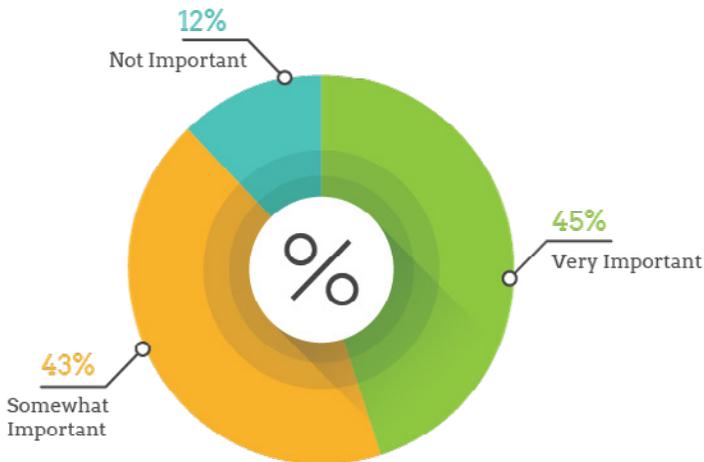


Having a section on your project page that shows people how to play your game through animated GIFs has become pretty common. If you have a complex game, you want to be careful not to have an overwhelming number, but a lot of people find them very helpful when it comes to learning the basics of how a game works.

There are a lot of people who would rather learn about the game from GIFs instead of videos, so you definitely want to consider including them on your page. Just make sure they look good.

I talk more about GIFs in chapter 9.

12. How important is it for a campaign to have a playthrough video?

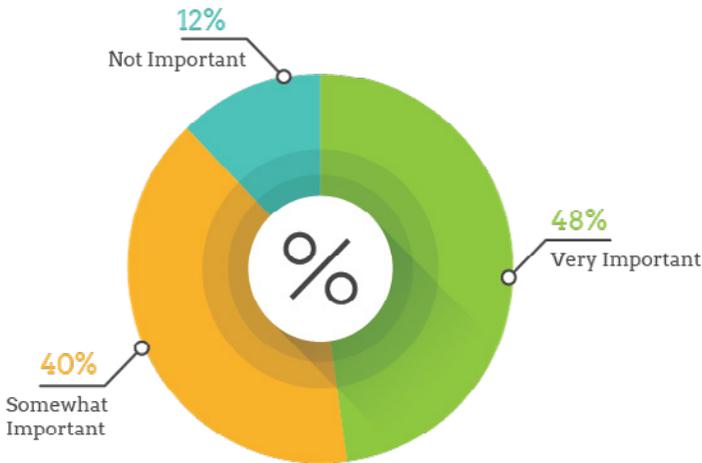


Whether you have a solo runthrough of your game to show off the gameplay or a video of a full-length multiplayer game session, a lot of backers want to see the game in action. They want to see what turns are like and what kinds of decisions they'll get to make.

And since 90% of backers said it's at least somewhat important, you'll want to set aside some time to film and edit a video that can be on your campaign page from day one.

For more about campaign videos, check out chapter 9.

13. How important is it for a campaign to have a downloadable rulebook?



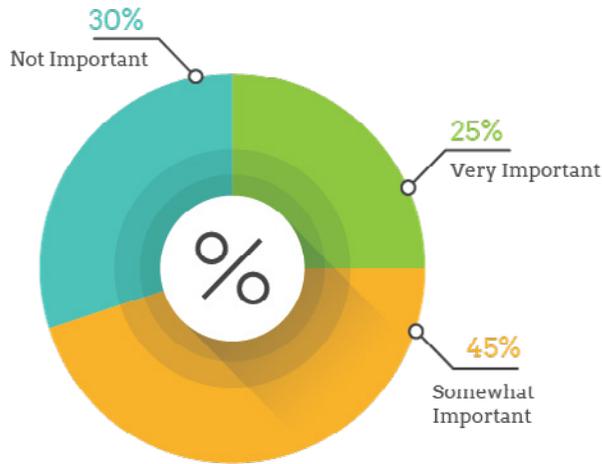
A lot of people will scroll directly down your campaign page to find a link to your rulebook. If you don't have a link, you're going to have a much harder time turning those people into backers. So, you definitely want to have a nice, big button for them to click to be able to easily access your ruleset.

And it's totally fine if the link takes them to a Google doc. Just make sure it's well-written and edited. And make sure to have pictures and diagrams. You can even generate some goodwill by giving backers the ability to comment and ask questions. And this will also provide you with some great feedback on how to make the rulebook clearer.

However, if you have a finalized PDF with awesome graphic design to link people to, it suggests your campaign is more polished and professional.

Learn more about this in chapter 9.

14. How important is it for a campaign to offer stretch goals?



Thanks to stretch goals that got out of hand, there have been a lot of campaigns that wildly overfunded and the creators ended up losing a lot of money in the process. So, you definitely want to do the math before adding more stuff to your game.

But based on the numbers, backers, for the most part, are still big fans of creators adding shiny, new content to the game, so make sure to have a plan in place long before you launch about how you're going to approach adding content and upgrading your game. (Just keep in mind that not all stretch goals are created equal.)

For a lot more details about stretch goals, check out chapter II.

15. How important is it for a campaign to offer Kickstarter exclusive content?

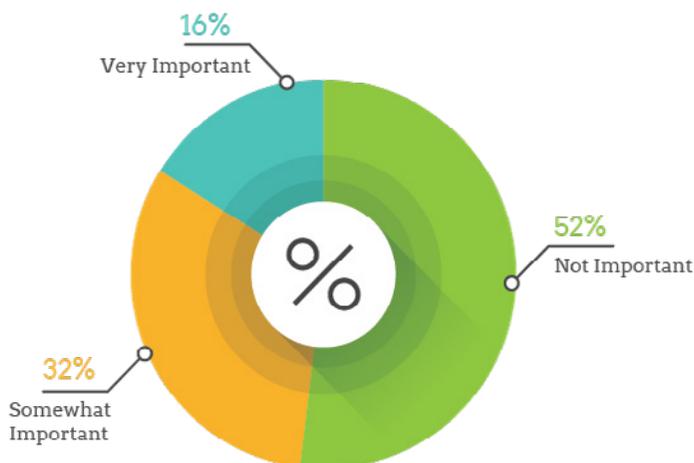
Having a bunch of Kickstarter exclusives can go a long way in getting people to back your game now instead of waiting for it to show up in retail. However, a little less than half of backers said that exclusives aren't important to them, so take some time to really think through whether or not you want to have them.

Shipping



There are a lot of backers out there who absolutely hate Kickstarter exclusives and refuse to back games that have them. Plus, there's a good chance that people who missed the campaign will feel like their game is incomplete if they aren't able to get all of the content.

16. How important is it for a campaign's creator to have backed other Kickstarter projects?

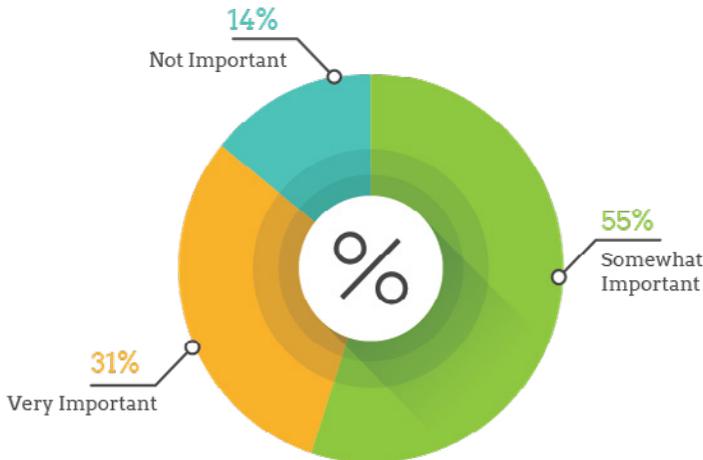


Many potential backers want to see that a creator has been an active member of the Kickstarter community. It's a small thing,

but it's something else that builds trust and makes people more inclined to give you money.

For a lot of folks, it's not a big deal if your profile says "first created - zero backed." But for others, it'll be a barrier that makes them skeptical of your ability to actually deliver a game. So, create a Kickstarter profile long before you launch and back other campaigns (even for just \$1). You'll likely learn a lot from other campaigns, and you'll build trust with future backers.

17. How important is it for a campaign's creator to have successfully fulfilled other Kickstarter projects?

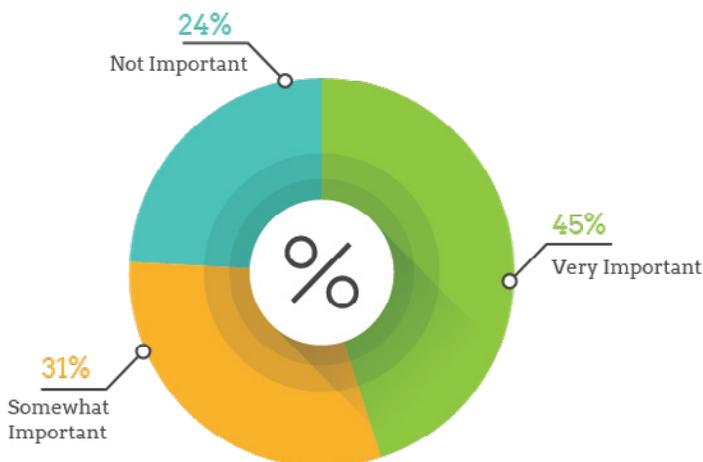


When you have no track record, you have a huge obstacle to overcome when it comes to people opening their wallets to give you money. It's a catch-22 situation in which you need backers to deliver a campaign, but to get backers you have to have delivered a campaign.

So, the best thing you can do is start off with a smaller campaign that is able to fund with a smaller number of backers. Then deliver the game (preferably on time or early). Then build up to a bigger campaign for your next project. And repeat.

Doing so will build trust, and it'll build an audience. And if you do things well, it'll build a crowd of raving fans.

18. How important is it for a campaign to offer “friendly” shipping to international backers?



At this point, with so much information online about how to do shipping and fulfillment right, there's really no reason to have shipping rates that cost backers more money through taxes and customs fees.

This is a huge issue for many international backers, and don't expect many backers from other countries if you don't offer a "friendly" option to get the game to their region.

You can find out more in chapter 16.

19. Have you ever backed a campaign for \$1 just to get access to the pledge manager later?

As pledge managers have become more normal, so has people backing games for \$1 just to get access. Some people do it because they're still on the fence about getting the game and they're afraid of missing out. Some do it because they don't currently have the money to pay for the game.

Just think of the \$1 backers as potential buyers who have one foot in the door. And then think in terms of what can you do to get them all the way in. Maybe it's a personal message to thank them for backing the game. Maybe it's posting some cool updates about the new stuff you're adding to the game. Be creative.



And even if they don't end up backing the game at full price, just remember that when someone backs your game for any amount of money, all of their Kickstarter followers are notified which is free advertising for your campaign. And just because they didn't go all-in for this project doesn't mean they won't be on board for the next one.

Learn more about pledge managers in chapter 15.

20. Have you ever backed a campaign after first seeing it through a Facebook ad?



With 2.5 billion monthly active users, Facebook is the king of op-

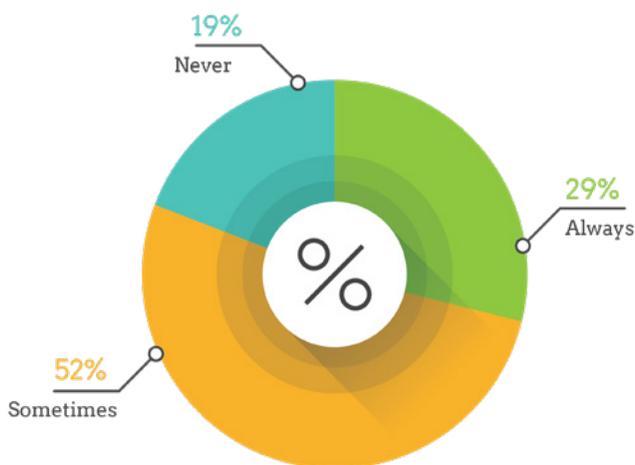
portunities when it comes to advertising your game on social media. And the data shows that lots of people are clicking on ads they find appealing and backing games.

Facebook ads aren't a magic bullet, and they likely won't save a failing campaign. However, if done well, they can lead to lots of new people finding out about your campaign.

So, learning the ins and outs of how to use Facebook's ad system will likely be time well spent.

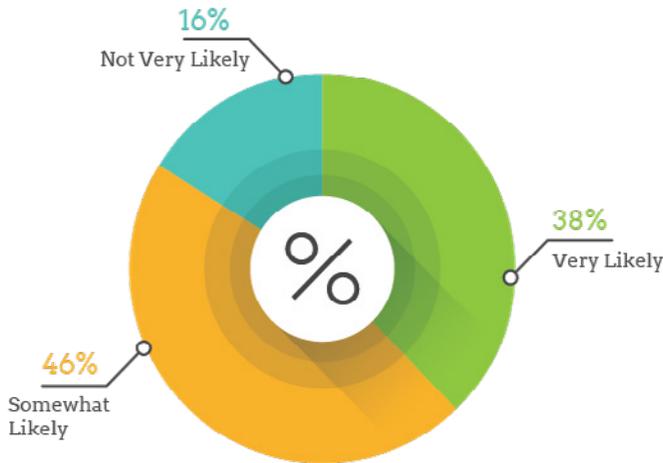
Find out more about Facebook ads and other marketing options in chapter 5.

21. Do you read the "Risks and Challenges" section of the campaign page?



The risks and challenges section at the bottom of your campaign page is a place where you obviously want to be honest about the possible obstacles you may have to overcome, but don't overthink it. Some creators basically write a book about all the many potential problems and setbacks they might encounter, but this is largely a waste of time. Get to the point, and go work on something more important like your rulebook.

22. If a campaign offers a “deluxe” version of the game, how likely are you to buy it instead of the regular version?



If your game can have a really nice, deluxified version, and you opt not to offer it, you’re missing out on what could be a lot more money. The Kickstarter community LOVES to get their hands on decked-out versions of games, so it’s in your project’s best interest to have a reward tier with things like upgraded components, metal coins, a wooden box, etc. if you can.

Not all games can do this, of course. Eurogames are a lot easier to deluxify than simple card games, but give it some thought and try to be creative. Many backers enjoy having a special edition of a game, and they feel special when they know few others have it.

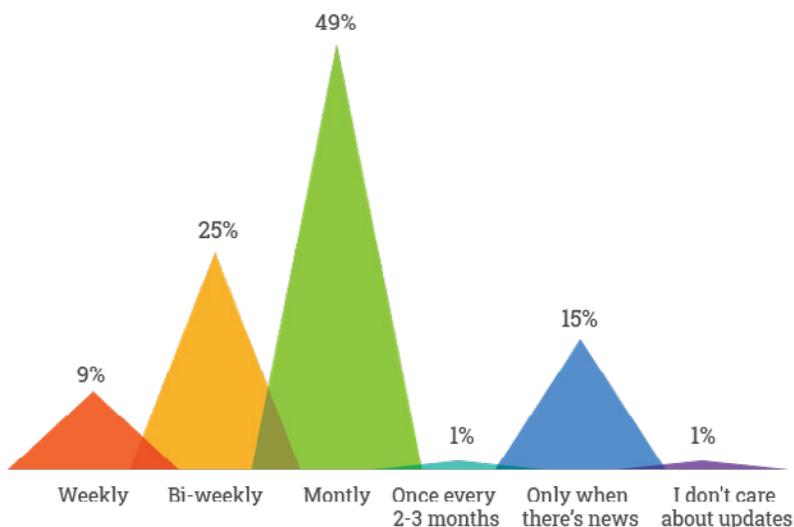
Just make sure to really do the math for how much your deluxe version costs, and price it accordingly.

23. How often should a creator post an update after a campaign successfully funds?

A lot of people use Kickstarter as basically a store, but the truth is that backers are more than just buyers; they’re also investors in your game. And as investors, they like to know that they’re money

is being spent effectively. And the best way to communicate that is through regular updates.

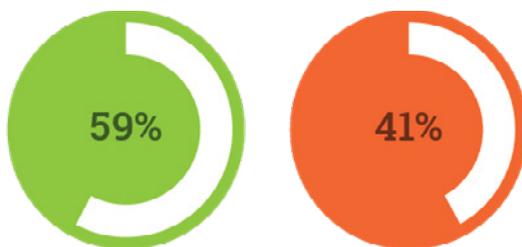
The majority of people want to hear from you once a month, and even if you don't have anything new to report, a quick update to say things are going well but there's nothing new to report will go a long way in maintaining backer trust.



Post pictures. Post charts and graphs. Post videos of you play-testing one of the stretch goals. Everything is content, no matter how big or small. They just want to hear from you. And remember: Bad news doesn't get better with age.

Learn more about crafting project updates in chapter 10.

24. When would you prefer to pay for shipping?



During the campaign

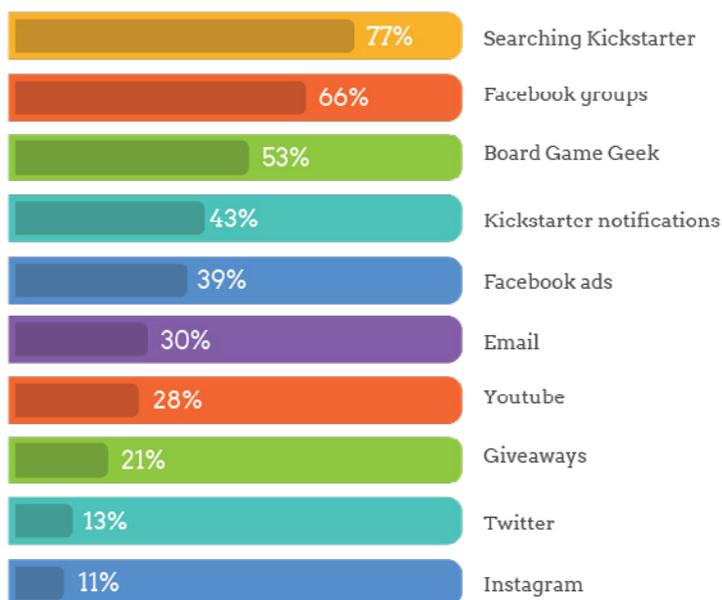
After the campaign

Backers are becoming more and more accustomed to paying for shipping after a campaign through a pledge manager, but the majority still prefer to pay through Kickstarter when they initially back the game.

There's not necessarily a wrong answer here. Do what's best for your project.

Learn more about charging for shipping in chapter 16.

25. How do you find projects to back? (multiple answers)



Based on this data, most people find games through Kickstarter itself, so you want to make sure to have an enticing campaign image and a tagline that really hooks people in.

Backers also use Facebook and Board Game Geek to stay informed about new projects which is something to consider when determining your marketing budget and deciding on where to focus your efforts.

Learn more about marketing your game in chapter 5.

Chapter 3:

Successful Creator Survey Data and Analysis

I'm of the opinion that the best way to be successful is to find successful people and do what they do. Want a happy marriage? Do what happily married people do. Want to be wealthy? Do what wealthy people do. Want to run a successful Kickstarter campaign? Do what successful project creators do.

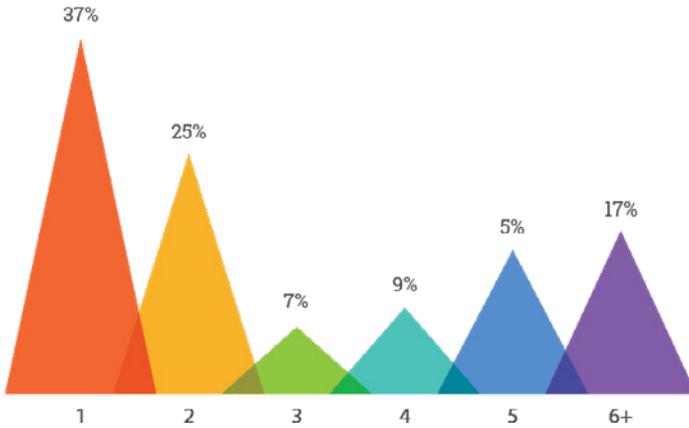
This is obviously common sense, but nowadays common sense isn't so common. You can go to Kickstarter's website right now and find dozens of campaigns that make it obvious their creators did no research at all before launching.

But what are successful creators doing?

To find out, I created a survey with nineteen basic questions to see if there were any trends or similarities among people who had successfully funded a campaign. Nearly one hundred people took the survey, and here is the data and my analysis.

Please note that most of the questions refer to a creator's most recent campaign.

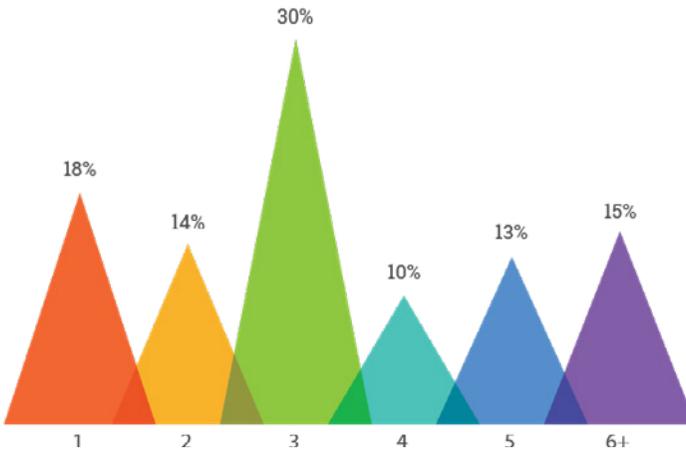
1. How many campaigns have you run?



Roughly two-thirds of this data comes from creators who have run one to three Kickstarter campaigns. And the other third has run four or more. So, just keep in mind that this data won't necessarily make you a million dollars on your next campaign, but it will give you an idea on what some of the common best practices are, especially among newer creators.

And if you're a new creator yourself, it hopefully gives you some hope and a bit of a blueprint on how to successfully fund your game.

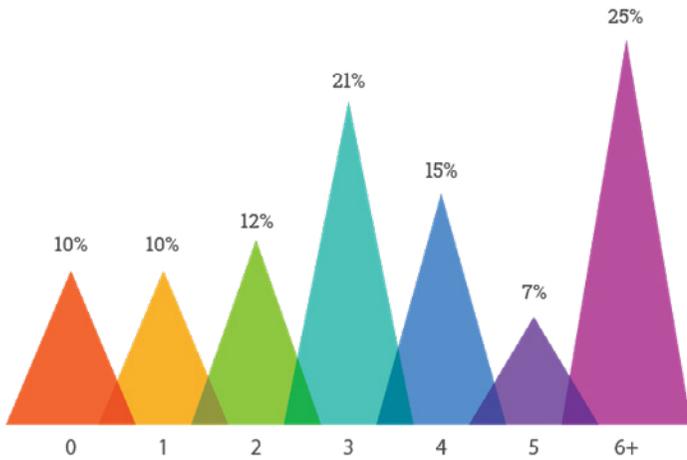
2. How many manufacturers did you get a quote from?



When you shop around, you're typically able to find a better deal, and getting price quotes for your game is no exception. However, about two-thirds of successful creators who took the survey only reached out to three or fewer manufacturers. Now, this could be because they had already run projects in the past and were so happy with their manufacturer that they didn't bother reaching out to others.

Or it could just be that a lot of new creators just aren't aware of the dozens and dozens of options that are available. In any case, it's generally better to reach out to quite a few companies before making a decision. And it's not only about price but also about where you fit into their printing schedule.

3. How many reviews/previews were on your campaign page?



Here's another place in which less is definitely not more, and it seems most creators are aware of how important it is to have lots of reviews/previews on the campaign page. Two-thirds of creators had at least three with the biggest percentage having six or more.

Not only does having lots of reviews/previews on your page build more trust with potential backers, but it also serves as a great way to market your game and get it in front of more people. Der-

ek Funkhouser, from the Board Game Spotlight, often talks about how important it is to “unlock audiences,” and this is a great way to do it.

Learn more about reviews and previews in chapter 8.

4. When did you charge for shipping?



During the campaign



After the campaign

If I had asked this question just a couple of years ago, the results would have been much more skewed toward during the campaign. However, with the days of “free” shipping largely behind us and the costs of shipping continuing to climb, creators are more and more charging postage after the campaign through a pledge manager.

When I asked Kickstarter backers what they prefer, the numbers were almost identical with 59% preferring to pay during the campaign and 41% preferring to pay later. And I think these numbers will continue to move closer to even as the practice becomes more commonplace.

There are pros and cons to both methods, and I go into more detail in chapter 16 when I discuss shipping and fulfillment.

5. Did you use a pledge manager?



Here's another big change in what has become normal for Kick-starter projects. Not too long ago, it was only the really big campaigns that were using pledge managers, but now they've become normal for campaigns of all levels of funding.

And the pledge managers themselves have also come a long way now providing a lot more than just a way to keep track of backers. You can find more details about these systems in chapter 15.

6. Did you promote your campaign at a convention either before it launched or while it was live?



Conventions are a great way to network, create fans of your game, and market your project. And it seems the majority of creators have realized this. Demoing your game at a convention is like airing a television commercial exclusively to people in your target audience.

It takes a lot of work, and you can easily overspend, but if done well, the result can be a lot more backers for your game (and names on your email list). You can find more info about marketing your game at a con in chapter 5.

7. Did your campaign have Kickstarter exclusives?



I was surprised that the majority of creators avoided Kickstarter exclusives. They can be a great way to get people to back now instead of waiting to buy the game after it is printed and shows up in retail.

However, based on the feedback from the backer survey, I think avoiding Kickstarter exclusives is the smart way to go. 44% of backers said that exclusives weren't important to them at all, and only 22% said they were very important to have.

I also received quite a few emails from people who wanted me to emphasize how much they absolutely hate Kickstarter exclusives, and several people told me they won't back a game that has them. Having content that is only available through your campaign can cause latecomers to feel frustrated and like the game is incomplete.

8. Did your campaign have a "deluxe" version of your game as a reward?

Deluxe versions of games have become increasingly popular over the last few years. This is especially true with Eurogames that have upgraded resources and metal coins. A lot of games don't lend themselves to being "deluxified," but based on the backer survey, a lot of

backers will gladly pay extra to have a nicer version of the game.



With 38% of backers saying they were very likely to get the deluxe version and 46% saying they were somewhat likely, it makes sense why nearly half of creators make sure to offer a deluxe reward tier.

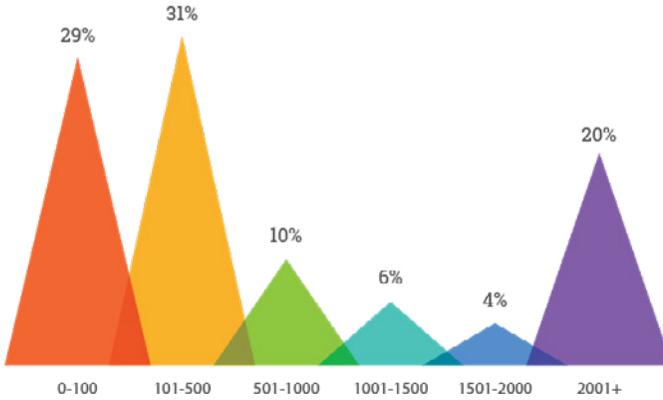
9. Did you run a giveaway for your game leading up to or during the campaign?



Giveaways are another great way to market your game and unlock online audiences. They can help create awareness for your campaign before it launches, and they can help you overcome the mid-campaign slump. Many board game Facebook groups offer opportunities for creators to run giveaways for their members, and considering that many of these groups have tens of thousands of people, it may be something you want to consider.

You can learn more about the value of giveaways in chapter 5.

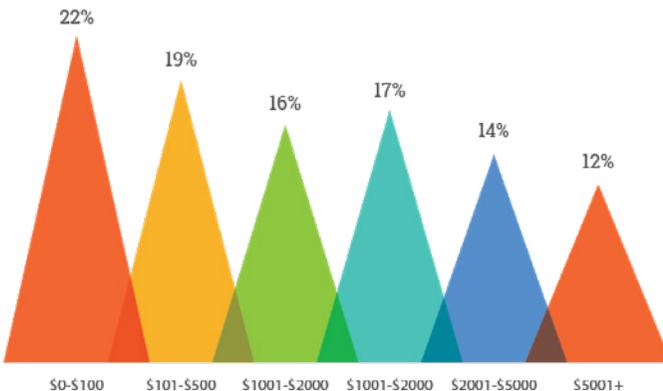
10. How big was your email list when you launched your latest campaign?



If you're just starting out, it should be encouraging that 60% of successful creators had 500 people or fewer on their email lists when they launched. However, I'm willing to bet that the campaigns that made the most money were in the 20% that had over 2,000 people on their lists.

Email is still the best way to market to people directly, so building your list needs to be a top priority in the runup to your campaign. You can learn more about list building in chapter 5.

11. Roughly how much did you spend on marketing leading up to and during the campaign?



I was surprised at how even the results for this question turned out to be. Almost a quarter of creators barely spent any money at all while the rest spent many different amounts. The main thing to take away is that it's not about how much you spend as much as it's about how well you spend it.

See more about how to budget for your marketing in chapter 5.

12. Did you use Facebook ads to market your campaign?



With over 2.5 billion monthly active users, Facebook is easily the biggest social network in the world, and the platform makes it really easy to get your ad in front of just the right audience. So, it's no wonder that more than three-quarters of creators used Facebook ads in their last campaign.

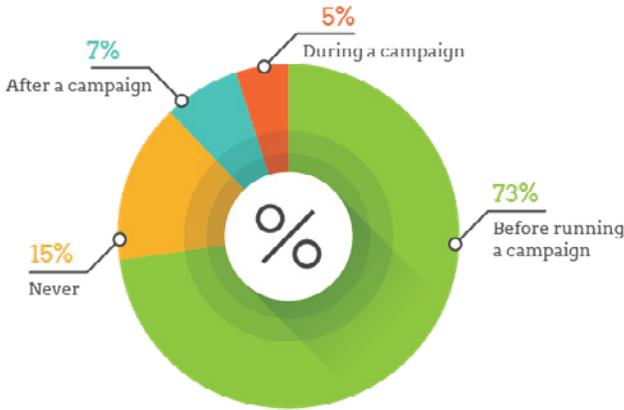
Creating Facebook ads that convert on a high level can be a bit of an art form, but if you can figure it out, you stand to bring in a lot more backers, especially since over half of backers said they've backed a game after seeing it through a Facebook ad.

Learn more about Facebook ads in chapter 5.

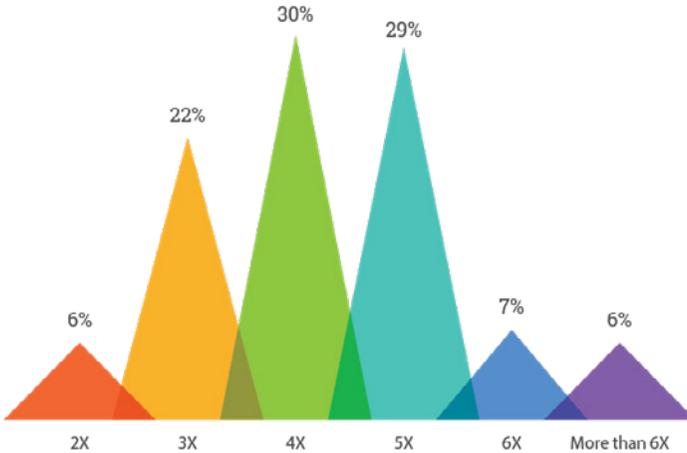
13. When did you start your publishing company?

It's good to see that the vast majority of creators are planning ahead and filing all the paperwork to become an actual company before they launch a campaign. Running a campaign means you're running a business, so you want to make sure everything is squared away when it comes to taxes, liabilities, partnership agreements,

and everything else. And the sooner you get it done the better.



14. How much did you charge for a copy of your game compared to the manufacturing cost?

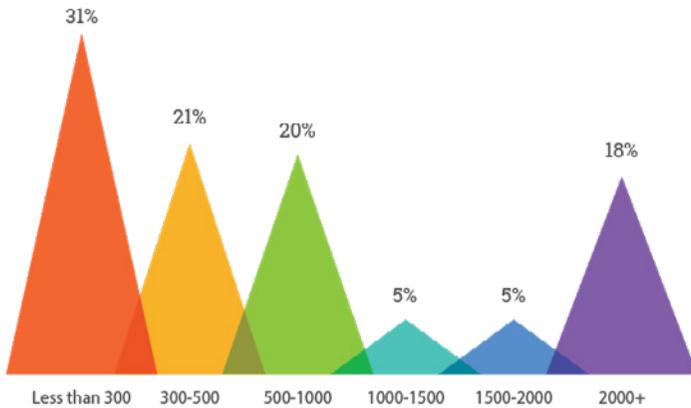


There are several things to consider when pricing your game. Many backers are looking for a deal and want to pay less than MSRP. If you're not planning on printing very many copies, your manufacturing cost per game is going to be a good bit higher. If you're subsidizing the shipping cost, that's going to eat into your

profit per sale. And you have to think about backer psychology - \$19 looks a lot better than \$20.

But as long as you're able to price your game at 3-5 times what it costs to manufacture, you'll be in line with the vast majority of creators.

15. How many backers did you have?

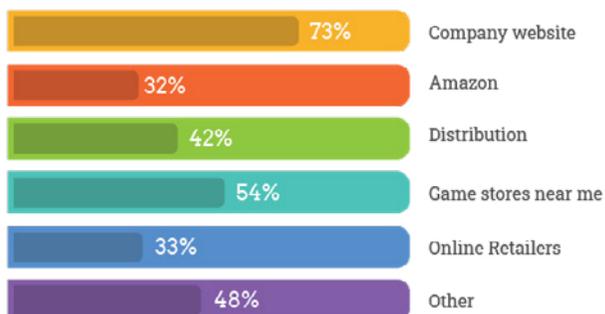


As Kickstarter has become more crowded, we're seeing campaigns with much lower funding goals. This is partially due to creators trying to manipulate backer psychology (people like to back a winner). And creators are more willing to put down their own money to bring a game to life. I also think that more first-time creators are starting off with a small, inexpensive project just to get their feet wet, and they hope to launch a much bigger campaign down the road.

According to the data, very few campaigns get more than 1,000 backers, but once you do, there appears to be a critical mass that occurs that will probably take your campaign above 2,000 backers by the end.

A good rule of thumb for your first project is to do a campaign that only needs around 300 people or fewer to fund, and this seems to be supported by the data.

16. How did you sell your game after delivering it to backers? (multiple answers)

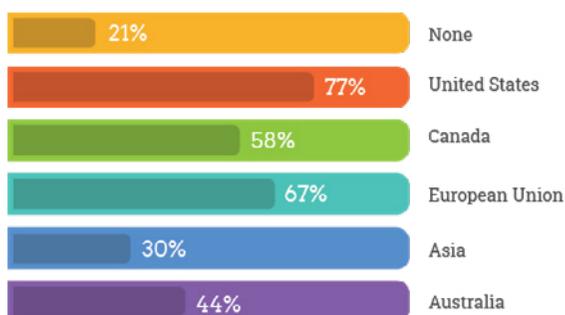


It's important to remember that Kickstarter is only one of many venues to sell a game, and since your print run is likely to have a lot more copies than just what goes out to backers, it's vital to have a plan for what to do with your excess games.

Whether they're taking up all the space in your garage or you're having to pay a monthly storage fee at a warehouse, you need to figure out how to get them onto more people's tables. After all, you didn't run a Kickstarter just to store the game.

Learn more about what to do after your campaign is over in chapter 14.

17. Did your campaign have "friendly" shipping rates to any of these zones? (multiple answers)



Based on the backer survey data, this is a rather important issue for most backers. A lot of people won't back your game at all if they can't get it without paying extra taxes and customs fees.

As board games have become more popular, lots of fulfillment companies have sprung up to ship your game from inside regions like the European Union so your backers can avoid any added costs. And if you don't offer "friendly" shipping rates, you're likely leaving quite a bit of money on the table.

Learn more about "friendly" shipping in chapter 16.

18. Did you add certain stretch goals based on backer feedback?



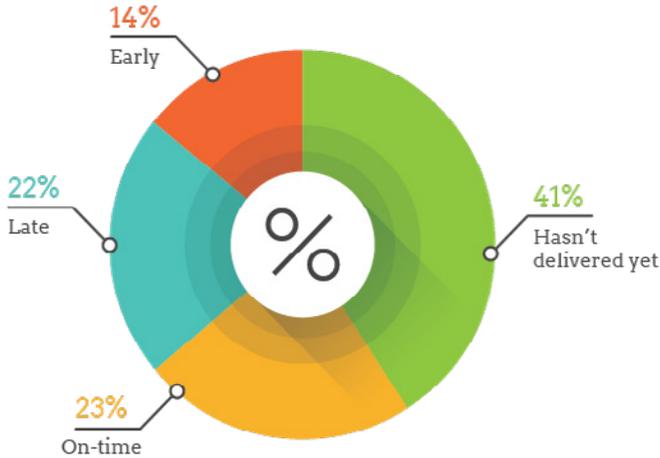
One of the best parts of running a campaign is having the ability to engage with your biggest fans and provide them with something they helped bring to life. And that's why over half of the creators in this survey have offered stretch goals based on what their backers were asking for. (I'm a little surprised the number isn't higher.)

You have to be careful not to overdo it as stretch goals can absolutely tank a project if you're not really doing the math on things. But when done well, they provide an opportunity to turn backers into raving fans and create a great deal of trust between you and them.

19. When did you deliver the game?

Another great way to build trust with backers long term is to de-

liver on time. Of the creators who have delivered their latest game, almost a quarter delivered late which will undoubtedly make people skeptical for their next project.



Now, sometimes a situation is completely out of your control, and delivery gets pushed back due to some unforeseen circumstance. So, you want to make sure you build in enough buffer to be able to absorb any delays in production and/or shipping.

Chapter 4:

Starting A Business

If you're going to run a Kickstarter campaign, that means you're also starting a business. Period.

Even if you only plan on running the one campaign and then riding off into the sunset, it's extraordinarily foolish to try to do everything through your personal finances and bank accounts.

Now, let me preface this chapter by saying that I'm neither an accountant nor a lawyer, so don't take this as accounting or legal advice. I just want to share with you what I've learned about the business side of things when it comes to Kickstarter, and hopefully, you won't make the same mistakes I did.

Also, all my business, taxes, and accounting knowledge is based on the laws and systems in the United States. Obviously, if you live somewhere else, your paperwork, requirements, fees, and laws could be substantially different, so make sure you research your specific area and processes.

You can also find a great podcast episode on starting a gaming business and handling the accounting here: boardgamedesignlab.com/accounting

In that episode, I interviewed the accountant who works with Stonemaier Games and many other Kickstarter creators and gaming companies, and we dove into lots of different topics pertaining to the business side of Kickstarter.

Start a Business

Before you even start down the Kickstarter road, go ahead and file all the paperwork with your local and federal government to become an actual business. This is obviously going to require different things depending on where you live, and the fees and requirements will vary from place to place.

When I began, I started a limited liability company (LLC) which protects my personal finances in the unlikely event that something terrible happens and I lose my business. There are lots of different options you can look into, but I believe an LLC is the best path to take when you're just starting out.

In the United States, the online company LegalZoom makes it really easy to navigate the process of starting an LLC if you don't mind paying someone else to streamline everything for you. They're especially a good option if you're the sole owner of the company.

If you're starting a partnership, you may want to pay a lawyer to draw up a contract for all the owners to sign. No one ever thinks their best friend will do something shady, but it's a good idea to have an agreement in writing that protects everyone long term.

You'll also want specific matters and percentages addressed in the contract so it's clear how to handle things like a partner wanting to leave the company or sell her shares.

I heard Gary Keller, who started Keller-Williams Realty, once say that he calls contracts disagreements instead of agreements because you only look at them when you disagree about something.

So, with that in mind, make sure your contracts are clear about anything that people could disagree on down the road. This is one of those hope for the best, plan for the worst situations.

Hiring a lawyer isn't the cheapest thing in the world, but it's often a whole lot cheaper than the financial mess that can occur later on if you don't have the right language in your contracts. This is not a place to cut costs.

SMCs and SKUs

To make tracking and selling games easier for retailers, the gaming industry uses unique SKU (stock-keeping unit) codes for every product a company sells. But first, you'll need to get your company registered in the database system.

To do this, you'll go through the Hobby Manufacturers Association (HMA) found here: hmahobby.org.

Contact them through email or over the phone to get all the details on the current process for getting in their system. There's also a small registration fee.

You'll have to create and request a unique three-letter code, called an SMC (standard manufacturing code), that will represent your company (STM = Stonemaier Games, etc.).

Then, using your SMC you'll create a unique SKU code for each product you sell. (Wingspan from Stonemaier Games has the SKU: STM900.) This helps to keep everything organized and groups products together that are related. For example, the first Wingspan expansion has the SKU: STM901. Presumably, the next expansions will have STM902, STM903, and so on. If it's in the 900s, it's a Wingspan product. While Stonemaier products in the 600s are part of the Scythe family.

And be sure to create a spreadsheet that keeps track of all the codes you've created. You don't want to accidentally use the same code twice.

Now, SKUs won't be particularly important during your Kickstarter campaign, but distributors and retailers order games based on SKUs, so if you want your game to have any kind of retail presence, it'll need a SKU code. Also, many fulfillment companies use SKU codes to keep track of your products to make sure they're shipping the correct items to your backers.

Unlike the SMC, you don't have to register your SKUs into a central database.

Open a Business Bank Account

Once your paperwork is filed and approved by the government, you'll receive everything you need to open a bank account for your business. I suggest opening a PayPal account that's only for your business as well.

When I first tried to open a business bank account, I was spending much of the year in Honduras where I was teaching English. And because Wells Fargo has terrible customer service, I was not able to open the account until I got back to the States. This meant that several months of income and expenses for my company had to go through my personal bank account, and it was a nightmare to unravel everything when it came time to do my taxes.

So, trust me when I tell you that opening a separate bank account and PayPal account before any money goes in or out is the better way to go.

And don't use your personal credit card for business expenses either. If you need a credit card, get one specifically for your business.

Not only does having separate accounts make tracking income and expenses easier and make your tax filing smoother, but it also helps protect your limited liability status in case you get sued.

Hire an Accountant

This is another place where trying to save some money by doing it yourself is likely a really bad idea. The government is going to get its money one way or another; the question is if you'll have to include a bunch of fees due to accounting errors because you thought you could handle everything on your own.

Find a reputable accountant who has experience working with Kickstarter creators. There are some nuances to the Kickstarter world that a typical accountant might not be aware of, so it's best to have someone who knows what they're doing.

An accountant will help to make sure you're sending in the correct quarterly payments, and they'll make sure you file your taxes correctly.

He or she will also be up to speed on the latest changes to the tax code to help ensure that you get all the credits and refunds you're entitled to. Hire an expert and let them do their job.

If you don't know how to draw, you probably won't be doing the art for your game as no one wants to see a game box with your stick figures. In the same way, if you aren't an accountant, hire someone who is.

And even if you know what you're doing, it's nice to have someone who can check your work.

Use Accrual Accounting

There are two types of accounting: cash-based and accrual. When it comes to Kickstarter, the basic difference is when you account for the money that comes into your company.

With the cash-based system, the money from your Kickstarter campaign counts as income the day you receive it.

With the accrual system, the money from your Kickstarter campaign counts as income when you deliver your game to backers. (There are certain time limits for this that sometimes change, so make sure you know how much time you have. This is another reason to hire an accountant.)

So, if you receive money on December 31st of this year but don't deliver the game until next year, your accounting method is going to have vastly different implications to how much you owe the government.

With the cash-basis system, the government just sees that you had a ton of money come in as income this year, and you now owe taxes on that income. A lot of that money will obviously be used to manufacture and ship the game, but that won't happen until next year, so you won't get the luxury of being able to write off those expenses before having to pay taxes.

With the accrual system, you can defer claiming that money as income until the game is actually delivered which will lower your tax burden as you'll be able to write off the costs of manufacturing and shipping.

However, be aware that you're not allowed to write off manufac-

turing and shipping expenses until the game is delivered. So if you run into a situation where you've paid for manufacturing, but the game doesn't get to backers until the following year, those manufacturing costs can't be expensed until the following year.

The accrual method takes a bit more accounting gymnastics to get right, but it's the better choice for Kickstarter creators.

If you're in the U.S., and you've been operating using the cash-based system but would like to switch to accrual, you simply need to file form F3115 with the IRS.

Going from LLC to S-Corp

Once your company starts making enough money to actually support paying you a salary, you may want to switch it from an LLC to an S-Corp.

I don't want to go into too much detail here because there are a lot of ins and outs, and this is definitely an area where you want to talk to an accountant, but switching to an S-Corp can potentially save you quite a bit of money on your taxes.

This isn't something to worry too much about when you're just getting started, but once your company starts making money, or if you end up with a mega-hit Kickstarter campaign, you'll want to explore this as an option going forward.

Again, I am neither a lawyer nor an accountant, and I'm only relaying information to you as best as I understand it. Take my suggestions at your own risk.

Chapter 5:

How To Market Your Project Like a Pro

Marketing is the most important aspect of your Kickstarter campaign. It doesn't matter if you've designed the greatest game of all time; if no one knows about it, you're not going to succeed on Kickstarter.

So, for this chapter, I reached out to Andrew Lowen, a digital marketer who specializes in board game Kickstarter projects. I asked Andrew to put together a chapter covering everything from a year away from launch all the way through after a campaign closes. And he did not disappoint.

He came back with an incredibly detailed plan that goes in-depth on every aspect of marketing a campaign. So, get ready to take notes. This section of the book will have the absolute greatest impact on your project.

Introduction

My name is Andrew Lowen, and I am the CEO of Next Level Web, a digital marketing agency based in San Diego, California. Since 2009, I have spent millions of marketing dollars and made tens of millions in return for over 400 clients across four continents.

I am a passionate board game player and designer, and in 2019 I combined these passions with my business by running Kickstarter client projects. In just our first 6 months, we helped raise almost a million dollars for board game clients through Kickstarter.

On a philosophical level, the goal of every campaign I run is to fund on day 1 and as fast as possible. Campaigns that fund early are more successful than campaigns that take a few days or weeks to reach their goal. This probably just sounds like common sense, but the "why" is an interesting insight into the mind of a consumer and is a cornerstone of my post-launch marketing strategy.

And in the following pages, I'm excited to share the tactics and

strategies I've used to help awesome creators like you find great success on Kickstarter. So, let's get started.

One Customer, Two Modes

My experience across hundreds of industries has allowed me to work with many different customer groups, and my success hinges on my ability to understand and monetize the message that makes them want to buy, call, or request a quote now (not later).

Kickstarter projects have a number of phases, but the two that I will be focusing on are **pre-launch** and **post-launch (while your Kickstarter is live)**. Much can be said for what makes a successful marketing campaign after your Kickstarter ends, but I will not cover that here (or I might as well write another book for all the information that subject would contain).

Let's get right down to it -- I want you to burn the following statements into your brain, because everything hinges on these two modes:

Prospective backers that find you in *pre-launch* will investigate and gather if a project looks interesting. They will check out your website, sign up for your e-mail list, and join your Facebook group or follow you on Twitter to ask questions and gather information.

Prospective backers that find you *post-launch* will only investigate if you are funded and are more likely to investigate deeper if you are well-funded.

There are outliers in both of these cases, but these are the assumptions I adopt for marketing Kickstarter projects, and they generally hold true. (As an aside, it helps if you put yourself in the mind of the customer and try to think like them -- if you're reading this book, you are most likely a customer of Kickstarter already, so you should be able to do this pretty quickly!)

Now that we have laid the philosophical foundation that guides our marketing decisions, let's get into the practical application. What does it all mean?

Those that get very interested pre-launch will form the majority of your day 1 backers. They are likely to back your project whether or not you fund. They want to “see your project come to life” as Kickstarter puts it.

If you aren't funded, those that find your live project will not back you. Kickstarter will bury you in search results so nobody will find you. Your project isn't a “winner.”

The mindset shift is an important one to consider. A strong understanding of these two customer modes is critical to the success of your marketing strategy because it is actionable information that will help you make good decisions.

What is our conclusion, then?

Your pre-launch strategy is critical to the success of your project.

What follows is my attempt to detail out a solid pre-launch Kickstarter plan. Though it is certainly not an absolute list, it will give you an idea of what you should be doing to prepare for a successful Kickstarter campaign.

The First Thing: Define Your Target Market

Oftentimes, great games go unnoticed and collect dust on shelves because they didn't have enough of a marketing engine behind them to get them noticed. I have consulted for both small and large companies that have this same problem.

Most game designers just want to design games -- the game itself is the passion project. Marketing can sometimes be left on the back burner because you don't need that until Kickstarter... right?

In fact, a great game designer should consider one fundamental marketing question even before the first prototype is created: **Who is my target market?**

The most common awful, no good, very bad answer is: “Anyone and/or everyone!”

The slightly less awful, but still terrible answer is: “People that like [insert game name here].”

A great answer is: “People like me [or a person you’re making the game for].” (This still needs to be better defined, but we can do that later.)

The best answer identifies a pain point and is hyper-specific! It’s also refined by experience, playtesting, and through gathering feedback.

To help us with this, please indulge a silly question: Where would you go to pick the fruit of an apple tree? Would you pick the lowest hanging apple, or would you bring your ladder to pick an apple at the top of the tree?

The “**lowest hanging fruit**” is a marketing phrase that represents the people who would be most likely to get excited about (and back) your product. They are easy to pick, and they buy much more readily and with less effort than fruit that is higher up the tree.

Your target market should be defined at some level when the game is still a concept in your mind. It should be considered as you put the prototype together. You should test that theory and refine it during your playtesting. By the time you’re ready to launch ads on Facebook/Google/etc, you should have a really solid idea of who your perfect customer is.

Some common pitfalls to defining your target market:

1) “I don’t want to exclude anyone!”

This is a common fear, but you’re not forbidding anyone from jumping into your game. If you’re making a deep 4X space game, let me tell you, my mom is going to hate it. You probably have a limited budget to work with, so you can’t afford to spend it advertising to people who aren’t interested in your game.

2) “I have no idea who they are.”

You probably know more than you think. Spend some time considering what sort of gap your game fills out there. What do you find lacking from games that exist now, or what inspired you to make the game in the first place?

Other things to think about are your game's depth, theme, or mechanisms. With a little brainstorming, you will be able to come up with at least one defining characteristic of the people who are interested in what you are making.

Before You Begin: A Warning

TL:DR - Is Kickstarter right for you?

This section is devoted to first-time creators at the starting line with a brand new project, and it'll probably be the most depressing thing you read in this book. However, being grounded in reality is the foundation of greatness.

Crowdfunding is hard.

Long gone are the days where you can go to Kickstarter armed with a really great idea, a rough concept, and an empty wallet.

Backers treat Kickstarter as a pre-ordering system, so they are judging what they see. They have largely lost the vision for what a project can become, having been trained by hard lessons in those they once trusted failing them.

Many Kickstarter backers are seasoned veterans, and your campaign needs to pass their scrutinizing test of worthiness. Your campaign page needs to look great, you need to have a polished product to show, and you need to prove this game is a winner by bringing a crowd of rabid fans to fund you before they see it.

That's right, you need to have built your crowd *before* you even get to Kickstarter.

All of this requires more time, effort, and money than ever before.

If you are just looking to make a thing and see it enter the world, there are lots of great print-on-demand options that can make it and ship one at a time. Go there and avoid the pain of fulfilling a Kickstarter project. Other creators in times past have wished they never opened up this can of worms, and I can't blame them for their regret.

Are you prepared to start a business? Are you ready to deal with the trolls of Kickstarter that point out every wrong move you make before canceling their pledge? Are you ready to be nice to angry backers who demand answers only a week after your last update? Are you prepared to work late nights to fulfill a project you promised for a funding amount that was lower than you expected?

To borrow a line from my favorite video game anti-hero, Illidan Stormrage, “YOU ARE NOT PREPARED!”

For those of you that felt a little stab of fear as you read all that, there is nothing wrong with taking some time to think about pitching your game to a publisher so they can handle all that for you.

If you are determined to do this, consider me your advocate -- I intend to share with you how my best clients get their Kickstarter campaigns funded.

By the end of this marketing segment, you will have a roadmap for what to do and when.

“YOU WILL GET PREPARED!” - Andrew Lowen

The Roadmap to Success

If you're still reading this, I have likely failed to scare you away, and you're going to do this!

That's great to hear!

In that case, you have some reading to do (even beyond this book -- more on that later).

What follows is a Kickstarter project timeline with actionable benchmarks. You can use these benchmarks to prepare as much as possible for your event.

For organization, we're going to split the timeline into the following:

1. More than one year from launch
2. 6 months out
3. 2 months out

4. 1 month out
5. 1 week out
6. Launch day
7. Mid-campaign slump
8. The final 48 hours
9. After your campaign

But before we dive in, I want to stress one piece of advice: You are only human, and you cannot do this perfectly.

Don't worry about doing everything, and please accept early on that many things you do are not going to be done perfectly. In fact, there may be elements of what you read that are just so far beyond your current bandwidth or out of your realm of understanding that you ignore them.

The more you know, the more you realize what is truly important. The more experience you gain, the greater understanding you will have for your next project.

Let's dive in!

More than One Year from Launch

Goals:

- **Get educated**
- **Set up your marketing system**

Get Educated

This is your time to get educated. If you're launching your first Kickstarter project, you need to do a lot of reading. There is a ton of wisdom out there, and you need to consume all of it.

Here are a few great resources for you, and your first actionable instruction:

Read everything on the following websites:

- kickstarterlessons.com
- boardgamedesignlab.com/kickstarter
- jamesmathe.com/category/kickstarter

These three sites alone have hundreds of great articles that touch on everything from your mindset pre-campaign to actionable advice after your campaign has concluded.

You need to begin absorbing this information at the pace of at least one or two articles every week because you'll need to draw on this base of knowledge later. In the near future, you will feel lost at times on your journey, and whenever you lose your way, you need to go back to the fundamentals and your base of knowledge to get refocused on the right things.

The biggest mistake you can make on your Kickstarter journey is to skip your education. While you're certainly going to make your share of mistakes along the way, research and education on what lies ahead will help you avoid some significant pitfalls. Reality can be a harsh teacher.

Your Marketing System

Systems help you get organized. A marketing system is something you need in order to capitalize on others getting interested in your game along your journey.

What follows is my defacto marketing system that I recommend to all my board game marketing clients. For my own game designs, this system has helped me to build my e-mail list and capitalize on every consumer touchpoint I have ever had. The earlier you put this together, the more profitable all your future efforts will be.

The best part is that even if you later decide that Kickstarter isn't right for you and seek out a publisher for your game, you will have something of great value to bring with you: interested buyers.

The marketing system is composed of a few elements:

- A Website / Landing Page

- An Email Marketing System
- A Community

The system as a whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and the longer you leverage it, the more valuable the end results will be.

Now, let's dive into how each part works:

A Website / Landing Page

Your website is for converting visitors into email subscribers. It gives a potential backer that heard about your game a place to learn more about it. Whether they saw it being demoed at a convention, heard about it from a friend, or saw you sharing about it on social media, the website is often the first point of contact.

Your website must have a way to capitalize on the interest of that potential backer, which means that you need to win the right to communicate with them via email or some other medium. If you don't have this system in place, you can't get their email, and they will forget you exist.

This early on, your website doesn't need to be a fancy production full of art. At this stage, more than a year out from Kickstarter, you're probably still making changes to your game. If you do have any concept pieces to use, then great! But vector stock images and images you took from your iPhone are fine. You might also ask your artist (if you've picked one) for permission to use a relevant piece of their concept art to spice up your landing page early on as well.

I build my landing pages in WordPress, but you can easily use a free/cheap website builder like Wix, Squarespace, Weebly, or others. Just don't buy multiple years of hosting upfront *please* (you will likely lose money and not get a refund).

There are 4 areas that are essential to your landing page, ordered visually from top-to-bottom:

1. Above the Fold
2. "What Is It?"

3. How To Play
4. Final Call To Action

Above the Fold

This is an industry term that means “the first thing people see without scrolling.” The term actually comes from the front page of a newspaper, where headlines had to grab your attention before you put it down, so you would unfold it and continue reading!

The essential elements to this section are all meant to address these quick messages your visitor needs to know:

1. You're in the right place.
2. You can join the email list for the thing you already know about.

Notice the underline? The “above the fold” section is meant to capitalize on those who already have information about your game -- not to win people over who are looking at your product for the first time. You'll get people signing up in this section before scrolling through your content because they just demoed your game at a convention or just investigated your game on social media. The people the “above the fold” section needs to resonate with are the ones already sold on following your game.

You need your game's logo above the fold (or just written in text if you have no art). A pitfall to avoid is to have a giant menu or a giant logo -- people only need to see it so it checks a box in their mind that they are in the right place. Everyone is wary of clicking a link and going to some strange location, so your logo is an immediate sign they are in familiar territory.

You can also have a call to action or other message, but keep it to a minimum. Only one typed message is allowed here, which is limited to 6 words or less (i.e. “Coming to Kickstarter this Summer”).

The last element is a large image that takes up most of the “Above the Fold” section, serving as a background to this section. If you

LOGO

[ART / IMAGE]

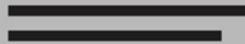
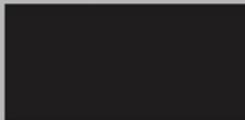


THE FOLD

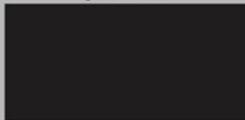


HOW TO PLAY

STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



FINAL CALL TO ACTION



have an artist's permission, this is where you'd place that art. However, in my case, I was much too early and just chose to use a cheap stock image of falling ashes. That worked well for over a year until I had something worthwhile to place there!

“What Is It?”

The next section is meant for visitors who aren't familiar with your game. Don't be afraid to separate this from the first “Above the Fold” section of your website, because people are used to scrolling down (thanks to the widespread adoption of scrolling on social media).

The essential elements of this section are:

1. A thematic text introduction (the hook)
2. Player count, age, time to play
3. An explanation of how to win and what mechanisms are used to play the game
4. A final email form

You can accomplish these things with a video about your game (homemade is okay for now), but all you really need is a block of text. Lead with the game's theme to hook the audience, and share the important overview.

Your website visitor should have a general idea if they would like this game. Just be honest in this section, and please use specific language. Don't try to hook anyone and everyone. Talk to your people here... the people that have been *craving* a game like this. Show them why it's the game they have been waiting for, but keep it relatively short. You should be able to do this in 2-3 paragraphs of 2-4 sentences each.

Don't forget your email form, because if you convince people that they should follow you in this section, you need to give them a call to action they can take advantage of immediately.

How to Play

If website visitors are still not convinced to give you their email address, but they have stuck around, they want to know more.

Give them a general overview of how the game works. Don't get into the details... More than a year out, they'll probably change anyway. So, the general experience is what you want to be more detailed about here. Give them a broad overview of how to complete a game (step 1, 2, 3, etc), and don't forget to include how to win.

The Final Email Form

There isn't much to explain here -- it's your last chance to win the right to communicate with the potential backer. They have scrolled to the bottom of your website, and if you lose them here, they are gone. Use strong language here to get them to act *now*. Also, make sure they know that you will never share their email with anyone (you better not) because people hate that!

An Email Marketing System

You need a place to store your subscriber list that will also filter out bad emails. Bots will find your site and add "honeypot" emails that will get you marked as spam by the big email providers, but reputable marketing systems will filter those out automatically for you.

I recommend MailChimp for a reputable email marketing system. It's free for up to 2,000 emails, it has all the functionality you need, it has great integrations for pretty much all website systems out there, and it has a nice easy app. There are other options, but this is what I recommend.

As an aside, I'm not going to detail how to get this installed on your website. You're going to need to figure that out. I recommend tools to make it easier, but just like that IKEA Kallax shelf, it'll take some work (and frustration, and maybe a friend's help).

When you add an email form to your site, only ask for their email. No first name, no last name, no checkboxes... Just an email address

and a “Sign Up” button. Keep it simple and you’ll get better results.

Download the app as well, so you can get people to sign up after a demo. Open your app, hand them your phone, and have them type their email in right then and there. No website required!

The Welcome Email

You need to make sure an automated “Welcome” email is immediately sent to those who sign up to your list. It will be their second time seeing you in a short period of time, and they will appreciate receiving it. For my clients, over 60% of these emails get opened on average.

Make sure your “Welcome” email shares a link to where a person can join your community (to be discussed next). This link will be clicked a very high % of the time. My clients see around 25% of those that open the email also click the link to the community.

Early Email Newsletters

You might not have much to share early on. I still recommend sending an update once a month on your progress, even if it’s just some pics of you playing prototypes and sharing what you did on the game that month. Any update is better than nothing -- the purpose of regular monthly updates is so that people don’t forget about you and your game.

Don’t be afraid of unsubscribes. People will unsubscribe, but you need to send the email anyway. Do it, or suffer the consequences of your email list giving you garbage results later!

A Community

Your community is where people can go to get routine updates at a greater frequency than your “once per month” email newsletter. I recommend starting a Facebook group for your game and focusing there (as over a billion people have a Facebook account), but you could use any number of mediums to build a community. Discord, BoardGameGeek, etc. could all be used to build your community.

The point of this is you need your fans to not only communicate with you but also with each other.

You can post once each day on a Facebook group and nobody will mind! Try that with email and you'll get tons of angry responses and plenty of unsubscribes.

Some people don't really use email, so you need a place for those people to go, too! This is your first step in **winning the right to communicate with people across multiple channels**, which will become a very important theme as we move forward.

Back to the Facebook group, I love this tool because it allows you to ask questions of prospective members. They ask to join and must answer a question (or few). Credit to Kirk Dennison of Piecekeeper Games for this tip: Ask for their email address as your first (and only) question!

"Would you like to receive our game's monthly newsletter? If so, please enter your email address."

Phrase this however you like, but I get about half of my group members to give me their email with this question. I drop them into MailChimp, they get the welcome email. The marketing system at work!

Courage Matters In Marketing

I feel it incumbent upon me to explain something to you that I frequently encounter when I work with publishers of all sizes: Email lists that haven't had a newsletter sent in months.

The primary reasons for this are threefold, often all playing a part in why to some degree:

1. They are busy.

It's not that they don't want to do it, but they don't have the time. My simple response is that this is so important to your results that you cannot afford to neglect this. If you really don't have the time, you need to hire someone to do this for you. If you do have

the time, you might be filling your available hours with busywork that can wait or just never get done. You can't afford to allow your newsletter to fall by the wayside -- it is not busywork!

2. It is hard to write about themselves.

As a marketer, I write for other clients every day, but when it comes to writing about my own company, I struggle! My clients often express this same frustration about writing for themselves. It's almost as if you're too close to the work. As the saying goes, you're "too close to the forest to see the trees." More pragmatically, you need someone else to help you understand what is fantastic about your company. In addition, I feel like I am being prideful if I speak too positively about myself and my service, but if others write honorable things about me, I never seem to mind!

3. They are afraid of unsubscribes.

This is something you need to embrace. There is no other way around -- if you send an email you're going to get someone that unsubscribes from your list. It takes the right perspective, and a little courage, to send an email knowing someone will find your content annoying, spammy, or useless enough to unsubscribe.

Do it anyway.

For every person that unsubscribes, 500 more people will appreciate what you have to say! Focus on the positive -- you're going to have to focus on the positive a LOT in the future because your Kickstarter campaign will be filled with negative things from trolls trying to hurt your feelings to backers canceling their pledges. Prep for it now, and it'll make the later experience a little bit easier to deal with!

Six Months From Launch

Goals:

1. **Organic email sign-ups**
2. **Get your people excited**
3. **Plan for reviewers and other media coverage**

Organic Email Sign-Ups

You have a great game idea, right? Now is your chance to really prove it. Share visually impactful things on social media to get more people interested (and more e-mail sign-ups).

In marketing, the term “organic traffic” means earned without paying for it. Its opposite is “paid traffic,” and you should not be paying anybody for digital exposure right now. You need to save your money for 2-3 months out from your Kickstarter campaign.

At this point, you are probably working with an artist, so you have more to share. You should be sharing images of your prototype, images of people playing your game, images of your art, etc.

My personal goal was to add 1 person per day to my email list or Facebook Group during this stage. I earned about 1,000 members in my Facebook Group and 1,200 people on my email list entirely organically. I didn't pay a dime to Facebook for them.

I did make my share of mistakes, though. I was kicked from a Facebook Group for being spammy (I asked forgiveness and received it). I got called out for trying to take from other groups without adding value on several occasions (I learned my lessons and started working to add value to others). But the one thing I didn't do was waste a ton of money to learn lessons here.

This is the time to do everything you can other than spend money on ads or any sort of promotion.

My one exception to this rule is this: A professional landing page will pay dividends on all of your efforts related to marketing your game. You should expect to pay \$500-1000 for this if you spring for it. Refer back to the landing page section to make sure you get what you need, regardless of what you spend. You have the art, you have better prototype images to share, and you're more solid on what your game is and who loves it than you were before (because you have probably done a lot of public playtesting by now).

Get them to your landing page or community. Share that landing

page. Share your Facebook group. The marketing system will do the rest of the work!

Get Your People Excited

A large email list isn't what gets you funded. What gets you funded are passionate fans of your game. You need to stoke their fire, and you must nurture it with new content on the regular.

The biggest pitfall I see at this stage is a dedication to getting new emails without cultivating those people into raving fans of your game. I call this "Internal Marketing."

You must treat your potential backers as insiders. Give them behind-the-scenes looks at what you're doing. Share what challenges you're facing, what you tried that didn't work, what you have accomplished that week, what art you're working on, etc.

If you're not an established company that is able to announce an epic release to your large list of raving fans and then bring it to Kickstarter within 8 weeks, you need to show what is behind the curtain. Chances are that if you're in that position, you already understand the value of cultivating your audience and have your own methods for doing that.

Find ways to share. Go live on Facebook in your group once a week. Share one small section of an art piece per week. Ask a question. Share a totally irrelevant meme. Ask your audience the best way to eat an Oreo. Share pictures of you making progress on your game. Answer questions from your fans about you, your game, and random stuff too.

As a designer, help your fans get to know you, and they might just care as much about you as they do your awesome game!

Plan Your Media Coverage

Now is when you should really consider your media coverage because they are often booked 2-3 months in advance. There are many areas to consider, but the more urgent ones are video pre-

views, articles on popular sites, podcast interviews, and ads/other coverage in popular board game Facebook groups.

Depending on your eventual ad budget, you might also have room for advertisements on sites such as BoardGameGeek, Dice Tower, or KickTraq. You should contact advertising managers at places like these to obtain prices so that you can eventually put a budget together with these things in mind.

In addition to some of the more obvious industry-related sites, you can also find specialty niche sites both inside the gaming sphere and outside. Just ask people where they go to get gaming news, and you'll be given a plethora of options to review.

Just don't be that person who asks if a popular reviewer or Facebook group has a spot open next week. 9 times out of 10, you're out of luck.

And lastly, this is a tip I learned from a friend of mine (Rob Geistlinger from Arcane Wonders): Don't plan for all your media coverage to hit on day 1 of your Kickstarter.

While I wholeheartedly agree with the sentiment that you need to fund as fast as you can, it's going to be because of the strength of your email list and the online buzz you generate as you get closer to Kickstarter. The positive reviews and media will only add fuel to an already burning fire. They will not light you up if you only funded 20% of your goal on Day 1.

Three Months From Launch

Goals:

- 1. Confirm your launch date**
- 2. Drive paid & organic traffic (to your landing page)**
- 3. Line up reviewers and media coverage**

Confirm Your Launch Date

It is important to reiterate that everything discussed here is under

a “give it your best effort” pretense. There is no way you’re going to get it near-perfect in every area unless you are an industry veteran and/or have tons of money to throw at subcontractors to help you. Your job is to give it your best effort, which might mean paying someone for their expertise, learning other things on your own, or just making a conscious decision to skip something entirely.

Just don’t let your fear of the unknown take over -- burying your head in the sand to avoid confronting the giant challenge ahead or slacking at this point is the worst thing you could do. This is the time that you must become firm on your launch date. While you can still decide to delay a week or two if necessary, the later you do this, the more you are going to mess up ALL your plans you set in motion with reviewers, fans, and more.

If you have cold feet, now is the time to reschedule the launch. You can’t let your launch date slide just because you procrastinate. If you cancel your launch plans, that means you’ve got a lot of things to reorganize, but it’s going to be a lot easier to do it now than after you’ve spent a few thousand dollars on reviewers, banner ads, and other marketing stuff.

If you’re freaking out around this time, I hope you have that fundamental education to fall back on. Fall back on what you know, and be sure to tighten your bootstraps before you take the next step. Ready to do this?

Drive Traffic To Your Landing Page

It’s time to polish up that marketing system and get people to join your email list, which you should be updating once per month with an email newsletter and as new subscribers join with an automated “Welcome” email.

By this point, you should have nice art available that you can use to really spruce up your landing page. Even an amateur landing page can get a great conversion rate when your art is fantastic. Give your landing page a review and do what you can to polish everything up so that you put your best foot forward.

A landing page that converts well is going to make the difference between your advertising efforts being a great success or an unsustainable bummer. My clock for launching ads begins at two months from launch, which means with three months to go, you have enough time to get your landing page updated before launching pre-marketing ads.

But before we dive into paying for ads, which not all campaigns can afford, let's talk about other ways to promote! There are two broad terms used in marketing for how you will bring prospective backers to your website: Organic and Paid promotion.

Organic Promotion

Organic is free advertising that is generated by you or anyone else that shares your content in their sphere of influence. Not only is this form of advertising free, but it also has the potential to spin wildly out of your control and "go viral" due to others sharing at an exponential rate.

We all desire this viral sharing effect, but it is rarely within your control. Therefore, I recommend that you do not put all your effort into going viral but that you control what you can. This wonderful effect may happen as a result of your project resonating with people, but again, you cannot force this to happen.

I say focus on what is in your control, pray for the rest, and hope for the best!

More actionably put, you can invest your time into sharing details in places that want to hear about projects like yours! There are social communities all over that congregate into groups to discuss hobbies and other topics according to their interests. You need to find them, engage there, and share in a way they appreciate.

Please don't spam their group -- you need to share about your project, and you need to get e-mails! But you can't just go in and share your web link with a short "Check out my game!"

That's a quick way to show them that you only value them for the money they can give you, which is a bad showing indeed.

But if you share things they value without pasting your link, you will get people to engage with you and your content. They might actually ask you for a link to learn more!

There are three elements to what we need to cover in regard to organic promotion -- where to find these groups, what to share, and how to do it.

Where do you find groups?

Social media and online forums are gold mines for groups.

Many **Facebook groups** have tens of thousands of members who are all interested in discussing board games or topics of interest that might be related to your game's theme.

Social sites like **Instagram** and **Twitter** have audiences that communicate through topical hashtags like **#boardgames** and searching for tweets or posts on these topics.

Websites like **BoardGameGeek.com** and **Reddit.com** have communities dedicated to specific games and are full of relevant topical discussions you can engage with.

Many podcasts like the **Board Game Design Lab** and **Think Like A Game Designer** have dedicated audiences that are interested in hearing from board game designers.

Tons of **YouTube Channels** exist to provide board game content to gamers hungry for information about what is new and exciting in the world of games. Interviewers, reviewers, and previewers often create their own content without cost, only asking for some time to prepare a video for you with your nice looking prototype (that they will send back to you if you take care of the nominal shipping costs).

What & how do I share?

Each community has its own set of written and unwritten rules

that you need to follow if you expect them to support you (and not delete/ignore your posts).

Facebook Groups have community guidelines that you should read -- thriving groups are often strict if you break their rules, and the admins will delete your posts, warn you, and eventually kick you out of the group if you keep breaking rules (like the common "No Self-Promotion" rule). But you can be greatly rewarded if you engage with them! And better yet -- create your own!

What to share:

- Questions you'd like answered by the community
- Helpful, positive, and constructive comments on others' posts
- Images of your game's art
- Visually impactful pictures of your game (i.e. - set up on the table, with/without players playing)

How to share:

- Provide context in your posts and comments (never post a pic without sharing something about the image).
- Never include a link in a post, excluding YouTube videos. Only share a link to learn more when someone comments (and keep it relevant).
- You can comment with a link to your website or your own Facebook Group, but be personable and avoid sharing things that aren't immediately actionable (only links they can click).
- Find out when they allow self-promotion and leverage that! This is typically a weekly post or a once-per-month allowance. Get permission from an admin first!
- Get others to share your stuff in the group for you. It's not self-promotion if someone else promotes you!

Reply to every comment with a personable response (don't over-share your link -- once is fine).

A “like” or other emoji reaction by itself is not enough!

*A note on Facebook groups: You should definitely create a group for your game because when it's your group, you can post what you want! It's always nice when the community exists to talk about *your* stuff.*

Instagram can be a strong source of engagement. When properly cultivated, your Instagram profile will pay dividends. Instagrammers react positively to visually impactful pictures and art, but you have to use the right hashtags so people can find your pics!

In addition, it's not just about what you share, but about how your overall Instagram feed looks. When someone visits your profile and looks at the feed of images you have been posting, they need to have a clear idea of what you're about! If they see tons of stuff about board games and art/pics of your games included, they are more likely to resonate with you.

Lastly, you only get room for a single link in your “bio” (aka the place people learn about you). This link is the key to getting people to visit your website and sign up to learn more. Your pics get them interested, your bio link sends them to the landing page, and the landing page closes them!

What to share:

- Images of your game's art
- Creative/artistic pictures of your game (use filters for more awesomeness)

How to share:

- Provide context (aka -- a description of what the pic is about in every post)
- Use as many relevant hashtags as you can think of per post (save them in a word document or note file for easy copy/paste)
- Reply to every comment (even the strange comments that are clearly bots) because they will encourage others to engage with your content.
- 1 post per day maximum

Twitter uses hashtags much like Instagram, but you are limited to 280 characters in your tweets. They are more often engaged if they are short, but sharing a long sprawling series of thoughts across multiple tweets can get engagement as well.

Communities find content by hashtags, but it is also common for others to follow you and engage even without hashtags if your content is interesting. Tweets rise and fall in a matter of minutes sometimes, so you can share multiple times per day without fear of repercussions! Text gets engagement, pics get engagement, and links get engagement.

What to share:

- Your inner monologue in text only
- Images of your life & hobbies
- Images of your game's art
- Links that you find interesting (Only 1 in 10 tweets should "sell" your game)
- Creative/artistic pictures of your game

How to share:

- 280 characters or less per tweet, but you may (rarely) tweet as many times in a single conversation to get your message across.
- Keep it engaging, and use hashtags so people can find your tweet!
- Only use a maximum of 2 hashtags per tweet.
- Reply to every comment, like and reply to every retweet or mention from others

A note on Twitter: This is a political hub of information and can be quite toxic at times. You need to recognize that everything you share is public information, so I recommend staying away from sharing political stuff here... or you risk alienating some of your audience! If you're fine with that, use at your own risk.

Forum sites like BoardGameGeek.com and Reddit.com have some serious organic traffic you can take advantage of if you play your cards right. BGG has a lot of game-specific forums and also a great set of game design forums to share your game. Reddit has many board game “subreddits” (aka sub-forums) that are specific to topics (like r/boardgames). Critically, if you want to be taken seriously in any of these forums, you need to spend time actively engaging and learning the culture of what people value (and what they hate). If you don't, you could find your post removed or generally down-voted into oblivion.

What to share:

- Your project with pics (Links are ok on BGG, but don't post links in your Reddit posts -- just in comments)
- Relevant topical discussion and news

How to share:

- Be genuine, and be prepared so you don't get your feelings hurt by those commenting (depending on the site you visit, people can be toxic)!
- Don't reply to trolls ever (When you feed them, they get stronger and more vocal)
- Trial and error -- you will need to spend some time learning the ropes by making mistakes!

Podcasts can be a great way to talk about your game because they have dedicated audiences that listen! The key to getting invited onto a podcast is to pitch them a discussion idea at an angle they find interesting. All respectable podcasts have the hosts' contact info available at the end of their podcast, on their website, and/or social media.

You're much more likely to succeed at getting an invitation to a podcast if you reach out to the host with a personable outreach that shows you have been paying attention to their content. It is a lot easier to customize a message that is attractive to the host

when you understand the subject matter they care to discuss on their show.

Some podcasts are also booked months in advance, so you should consider this when reaching out! These people are busy, so be gently persistent until you get a response, and be open to rejection. Your job is to do your research and pitch ideas.

For example, I might go to a great podcast creator like **Gabe Barrett** from the **Board Game Design Lab** and write an email like this (using “marketing” as my subject):

Hi Gabe,

First off, I recently discovered your podcast and have been enjoying your interviews a lot! The interview you did with Justin Gary was super helpful to my own design efforts, and I appreciate that you discussed the subject of making games that last in so much detail.

Your format gave me an idea that I think might add a lot of value to your listeners, but I wasn't 100% sure how to frame it to you. Here are three ideas I was thinking about:

- 1. How to market your game on zero budget*
- 2. Marketing 101 for board game designers*
- 3. Kickstarter marketing basics*

If you think a discussion on marketing would be a good idea but would rather frame in a different context, I'd love to hear your idea. But if you would like me to expand on any of these ideas, I'd be happy to do that for you.

I love your podcast, and I look forward to hearing from you!

Kind regards,

Andrew

Many hobby **YouTube Creators** would love to have more content to share on their board game-focused YouTube Channel. They are building their followings and often have a goal of growing into a place where they can charge for their services, but in order to do

that they need to command a large following that promises a good return to a prospective buyer.

They are often very appreciative of anyone that is willing to send a prototype. Just make sure to get their buy-in first! Also, as it is a very low barrier-to-entry to start this effort, you risk losing your prototype if someone elects to just take your game and never finish the video. You have little recourse in that case, so buyer beware!

I recommend looking at their history of producing content -- if they have been around for a while and produced some decent content, I'd trust them a lot more with a prototype copy! They also often send your prototype wherever you want after they are done, which allows you to use one prototype for multiple reviewers! Just contact them directly off of YouTube searches or ask for referrals to these creators in other gamer communities on social media.

The one thing I will highlight here is that you should consider the sort of games they review before sending a prototype. If they are into short party games, don't be surprised if they are less than enthusiastic about your giant, solo, narrative-driven sandbox dungeon crawler. Do your research before reaching out, and make sure they know what sort of game you want reviewed!

Paid Promotion

Paid forms of advertising all require you to pay for the privilege of reaching those people you cannot reach otherwise. There are many platforms to advertise on -- in fact, there are far too many to write about in this book. What follows are the "big" sources and an effort to lump everything else together for a bit of actionable, general advice when dealing with advertisers.

Before we dive into paid ads, there is a fundamental level of knowledge that you need to gain in order to even browse advertising platforms that you will not learn from this book. The purpose of this book is to help you effectively use them, and therefore, we will assume that you have a basic knowledge of the platforms herein. That said, many that read this book will need to run a crash-course

of these platforms on their own, so I'll try to drop keywords here and there so that you can find your way to the things that matter. If you need help, it may be worth your while to pay for an hour or two of an expert's time to help you learn the basics.

Furthermore, the elite "tricks of the trade" on how to really crush it with ads on these platforms have entire books written about them, so I will not exhaust every possible thread to teach you everything I know. What I want is to give you a solid fundamental base that will help you make your Kickstarter ads a success, or if you hire out, a set of key performance indicators that you can measure against your current results to prevent a malicious advertiser's attempts to mask their poor performance.

In this section, you'll receive some important benchmark figures for determining the effectiveness of your ads. A disclaimer about these figures that you need to keep in mind is this: If you aren't routinely connecting with your audience after your ads, they will forget about you, and you will end up with far inferior results than what you could have if you were consistently sharing.

I'll say it in a different way: If you don't send regular email newsletters to your list, they will forget you. If you don't post regularly in your Facebook group, Twitter feed, etc... then the audiences you once captivated on your platform(s) of choice will disappear, and your results will be far less than you could have earned if you had been diligent and courageously updating your audience.

Facebook Ads

The giant of Kickstarter marketing is Facebook ads. Companies that make millions on Kickstarter all leverage this advertising medium because it is the one location that you can segment users by their actual self-declared interests. Other platforms may also imply a general board game interest, which we will discuss later, but Facebook can segment people through highly specific criteria that is unlike any other platform out there.

To use Facebook ads effectively, you need to use a “Pixel” which tracks data. Remember when I said this book wouldn’t teach you the basics? I’m sorry to say this first bit of direction might be annoying for some of you, but it’s important:

- Make a pixel. Install the pixel on your landing page. Track your sign-up forms as “Lead” or “Subscribe” events using **Facebook’s Event Set-up Tool** (technically, you should be labeling them as “Leads,” but I find “Subscribe” makes just as much sense as a label for an email signup).

Again, I’m sorry for what this will put some of you through. Work at it, make it happen, and don’t neglect it!

The benefit of having your Pixel on your landing page is that Facebook will use it to *learn*. Yes, that is right -- Facebook will figure out who loves your content, and then work to show highly qualified people your ads. Facebook will filter people that aren’t likely to subscribe to your email list *if you set that Pixel up.*

Primary “great” benchmarks for Facebook ads (in \$USD):

- Cost per click: **\$0.20 or less**
- Cost per Lead/Subscribe: **\$2.00 or less**
- Landing page conversion rates: **10% (1 in 10 clicks or better should subscribe)**
- Starting budgets: **\$20 per day (assumes 2 months of ads at \$600 per month)**
- I find subscriber to backer conversion rates are as follows:
- **10-15%** of these email subscribers that go to a landing page and then sign up will also back your campaign when it is a list that has been specifically created for that game.
- **5-8%** of your company email list will back your new games (with potential for more if your company does a great job turning fans of your games into fans of your company).
- **1%** or less of nearly all other email lists will back your game.

That means most offers to have your game blasted out on a large email list will return little to nothing for you.

A few notes on these benchmarks:

- If you're getting great cost per click, but your cost per subscriber is high, your landing page is the problem. It isn't converting as well as it could (refer back to the landing page section in this guide).
- If your cost per click is high, but your conversion rate is 10% or better, your ad OR audience is the problem (diving into audiences in a sec).
- In the tiniest number of cases, these numbers might help you realize your messaging is off, or people don't like your game in its current state, but this is typically a problem that stems from a lack of playtesting.

Note: Facebook also has "lead ads" that do not require people to go to your landing page. These offer amazing conversion rates from users to emails, but awful conversion rates from email subscribers to Kickstarter backers. Avoid this like the plague.

Creating an Audience

I can't stress to you enough the mentality of "picking the lowest hanging fruit" in your ads. You should be targeting the people most likely to throw their money at you and excluding everyone else unless you have a very large budget to invest.

The three parts of a Facebook campaign are labeled as follows: Campaign, Ad Set, and Ad

Your audience is determined inside the **ad set**. There are a great number of possibilities for audience angles, but for board games, we can pair down the possibilities to the following essentials that you should probably not touch:

Location: United States

Age: 18-65+

Demographics: All (Men + Women)

Interest Group 1: Kickstarter

Interest Group 2: Board Games

Interest Group 3: Specific Interests -or- Lookalike (discussed later)

If you cut your age to something like men only aged 25-45, you're hurting Facebook's ability to help you by its learning. Facebook will find cost-effective outliers that will subscribe and back your game based on their interest matching algorithms, so let Facebook have room to help you here!

As far as location, the US accounts for over 60% of backers for the average campaign, so target here. If you're looking for an English audience and are logistically prepared to expand your audience, Canada, the UK, and Australia are what I target (in that order).

Three different interest groups can have more than one similar interest inside them depending on your game. The only interest I recommend against changing is Group 1 -- leave Kickstarter by itself, because you're driving for Kickstarter sales, so you want ads that target people that already know how to use the site.

Interest group 2 is all about the type of game you have. You might have a heavy board game, so you could add **strategy games** as an interest, which would complement this group. If you have a card game, you would want to add **card games** and maybe even **collectible card games** as interests. Make sure to remain as specific as you can be here -- multiple interests in this group can cause you targeting issues.

Interest group 3 is where you can go wild. You have targeted those that are into Kickstarter AND Board Games, so your third interest is really about your game's theme. You get to explore different segments of people in this group, and the right groups can reward you with great numbers. My best numbers ever for a client were \$0.06 per click and \$0.35 per email subscriber, and they were thanks to a very good ad and a very good audience segmentation in group 3.

To use a specific example, I am marketing a game designed by Wes Woodbury called **Die in the Dungeon!**, which is all about playing a boss monster in a dungeon doing battle with heroes using a set of RPG dice to account for stats.

We targeted dungeons and dragons, tabletop role-playing games, and every D&D creature listed in Facebook's interest list. We had at least 40 interests in this group, and the ad campaign performed very well, earning nearly 500 emails for an investment of just under \$800 for an overall cost of about \$1.58 per email. We had a ton of additional organic reach develop from those ~500 email subscribers, which were filtered into a Facebook group and to their Kickstarter landing page. Their Kickstarter launched with 800 Followers, about 1,000 emails on their list, and over 500 members in a Facebook group.

The biggest part of all of this: **The vast majority of all of these leads that will back the project are going to do it on day 1.** They have already been convinced, and all they care about is getting this game!

The first day saw 377 backers pledge over \$16,000 to fund 80% of the project on day 1. The conversion rate of all of this interest was well over normal standards of 10-15% due to the amount of buzz generated by the organic and paid marketing efforts.

This is a great example of when organic effort and paid promotion are combined, and I am sure every new creator would consider that \$800 to be well spent.

Creating an Ad

It is my firm belief that ads drive interest through three elements, and in this order of importance:

1. The Image
2. The Headline
3. The Primary Text

For the purposes of this book, we're not going to go deep into vid-

eo ads, but I can tell you that they are almost always less effective than images.

The image should be a picture or art from your game that shows the theme or the game itself. The main pitfalls to avoid here that are beyond common sense are text on images or busy art -- Facebook doesn't like text on images, and if an image looks busy, someone will fail to grasp what it is and will keep scrolling.

Here are a few ideas for great uses of images:

- 3D renders of your game box and components
- Your box art or art that shows the beauty or horror of your game's world
- Art of your main characters
- A combination of multiple sources

The headline is your main callout. What makes your game special, or why is it fun? Make sure to keep it to 2 lines, and don't allow your ad to cut your text off with a "..." - Also, Emojis are great to use here! Keep it short and impactful!

Primary Text is where you answer the question "what is it?" If you have space, tell us why your game is special. Again, don't let your text get cut off with a "..." - you are limited to 3 lines, including your emojis!

Board Game Specific Forum Sites

In the world of board games, there are only a few websites that you can advertise on that will have a direct reach into the hobby board game market. You probably know some of them well, and others may escape this list. They are all great sources of traffic, but they can sometimes cost a pretty penny and have a poor conversion rate in the wrong circumstances.

You're probably not going to advertise on these sites until you launch, but it would be a good idea to figure out their numbers and book space for when the time comes. The worst thing would be to find out that the time slots you wanted are all booked up!

Here is a partial list of great sites to consider:

- Boardgamegeek.com
- Kicktraq.com
- Reddit.com/r/boardgames
- TheDiceTower.com

Facebook Group Banners & Giveaways

This segment is another that usually falls into the “go live when Kickstarter goes live.” However, it is in this section, because you need to book your space 3 months early. The popular board game groups sell their banners a week at a time, and they often sell one giveaway per week. These fill up quickly, so make sure to book early!

Here is a partial list of great board game Facebook Groups to consider:

- THE BOARDGAME GROUP
- Board Game Spotlight
- Board Game Revolution Community
- Tabletop Backer Party
- Board Game Design Lab Community

Paid Reviewers

Paid reviewers will do professional board game previews and share them with their audiences. The reason these guys and gals require payment is because their reputation moves the needle for people looking at your Kickstarter page *and* they bring a large audience with them, which means potential backers and return on investment.

These reviewers often need at least 2 months of time to produce a great video or written preview and will charge you extra if you need it rushed. Get your orders in early! You can always find their contact information on their YouTube channels or websites.

One extra thing to consider, just like the free reviewers listed in

the Organic section, is that they each have preferences in the types of games they like to play. These guys will likely reject your project or, even worse, give you an unfavorable review if it's not the type of game they like. Therefore, it is important to vet your reviewers before you reach out to them.

As far as the quantity of paid reviews you need from one of these high-end sources, I'd recommend getting at least one professional overview and a playthrough video for your Kickstarter page. You don't need a ton of these, but they lend credibility to your project. Their audience backing you is a bonus but not a guarantee! I recommend having 3 preview videos + 1 playthrough video, but only one of these sources needs to be a professional -- the others can be from the freebies.

As a last note, they will freely pass on your prototype to an address you designate as long as you pay for shipping! These people are very reliable as they rely on a great reputation to get more work.

A few professional reviewers that carry a lot of weight:

- Man Vs Meeple
- Rahdo Runs Through
- The Dice Tower
- Undead Viking
- Tantrum House
- You can find a more in-depth list here: boardgamedesignlab.com/reviewers

Media Coverage

Many websites that cover gaming, as a general interest, exist out there. In fact, even mainstream news sites like the New York Times have covered board games. You can create and distribute a press release to try to attract attention here, and though this is listed in the paid channel, it is often free if you get interest.

Other sites will welcome your payment for writing an article, and

they may have the website visitor metrics to justify such a payment! The key is to ask them how many website visitors they receive, how many average pages those visitors view, and what their average time on the site is... Make sure to get a few estimates by asking around to see what the best options are if you want to go this route. I have seen many of these sites deliver backers from a well-syndicated press release, which means you're probably going to want to pay a professional to write and deliver it.

Marketing Agencies & Freelancers

I'll not spend a ton of time in this section, but you can hire an agency to do a lot of this work for you. I routinely consult with Kickstarter creators to navigate these waters, and there are more than a few other highly reliable professionals in the industry that do so. Rather than give us too much time, I'll say that you really need to vet these people.

It's easy to talk well on the surface, but it's often only after you have paid them and received far less than expected (or even nothing at all) that you see through their smoke and mirrors. It might sound harsh, but you are only doing yourself a disservice if you trust someone's technical skill. For example, I'm giving you tons of actionable marketing content in this book, but it would probably be better if you would ask what projects I have helped fund, and then go ask those creators about their experience working with me.

Do your due diligence and make sure you are willing to trust your marketing team. Hindsight is 20/20, as they say, so go get some hindsight from a few happy customers!

One Month From Launch

Goals:

1. **Give yourself a gut check**
2. **Build your Kickstarter page**

Gut Check & Re-Affirmation

Great marketing is transparent and honest with supporters. Therefore, even the way you reply to a backer or on a thread will help or hurt you in the eyes of many.

My question to you right now as your advisor is “Are you ready for this?”

It’s not too late to delay your launch to buy yourself some more time. You don’t want to be one of those projects that takes way longer than expected to deliver, or even worse -- a project that was obviously not prepared for Kickstarter success!

I have personally worked with companies that have raised over \$60,000 within a single day, only to end up at \$50,000 total raised on day 30! Backers have a true radar for unprofessionalism and unpreparedness, and they will find all of your holes as a project and as a creator!

It is your job to be as prepared as possible, and then adjust your offering or fix your errors as best you can. Your committed backers will tell you what they want, so it’s your job to show your quality and constructively deal with the inevitable questions, requests, and complaints that arise after you launch. You can only do that well if you prepare ahead of time.

You need to know your manufacturing numbers. You need to pre-plan stretch goals (unless you consider and elect to exclude them). You need to know preliminary freight and shipping numbers. You need to know if you’re going to have EU/CAN/AUS/US-friendly shipping or not. You need to have a legitimate reason you are pricing your product at the price it is, and if you plan on trying to make it into distribution or going Kickstarter/Online/Convention exclusive sales only. You need to price your funding goal and plan your costs so that you don’t go broke trying to fulfill your dream.

You need to find a way to keep a little money at the end of the day so your spouse will let you put your family through this ridiculous thing again. And if you aren’t planning to do it again by this point,

you should at least consider pitching this game to a publisher. If you're not ready to be a business person, this is your time to reflect before you have a Kickstarter baby that you need to love, cherish, and support for years.

If you're still in, seriously call in and get a few days off work the week of your campaign. You're going to need it because you have some late nights in your near future!

Build Your Kickstarter Page

You might have been toying around with your page before, but this is the time you need to build this thing out. My goal is to be able to share a project preview link with the full page on display a week before the campaign goes live, so you have this time to get there.

By now, you should have all your art assets that are necessary to show your product off. You should have pictures and videos and 3D art assets. Enlist the help of a graphic artist to make a great page!

There are a few elements that I consider absolutely essential for your Kickstarter campaign layout. Here they are in the order I most prefer them:

1. A short written thematic introduction, paired with #2...
2. A compact and nice-looking components image that shows the box + everything.
3. "What's in the Box?" Pledge tiers that break each component out to showcase value.
4. Reviews/Previews/Playthrough videos
5. How To Play (with GIFs and rulebook PDF download)
6. Shipping info
7. An honest "Risks & Challenges" section

In addition to this, I also would like to see graphics encasing the section headings and bite-size written testimonials scattered throughout the campaign page.

(You can find in-depth information about campaign pages in chapter 12.)

Hygiene Factors

Have you ever left your house to go on a date and realized in your nervousness and rush you forgot to put on deodorant or brush your teeth? I have been there before, and man was I embarrassed. Needless to say, forgetting one or the other will hurt your chances of getting a second date. However, doing these things won't guarantee a second date.

These factors will hurt you if they are missing, but it is your personality and the way you treat your date that will really sell you, right? In the same way, certain parts of your Kickstarter page won't necessarily help you fund faster, but they will hurt your ability to fund if they are missing.

These elements are all encased in the above "essentials" list. If you're missing any of them, they're going to cause backer mistrust, and it is your duty to check every box on that list. If you cut corners, you're going to hurt your ability to fund early.

And funding early is essential if you want to overfund!

One Week From Launch

Goals:

1. **Get everything finished**
2. **Prepare your fans**

Get Everything Finished

I can't even express the severity of the timing here... You need to be ready in 7 days. You have told your email list. You have used your last week of vacation time. You have posted about it 10 times in your Facebook group and on that BoardGameGeek thread you keep updated. You have all of your reviewers lined up and videos waiting to be posted. You have all of your banner ads and website ads planned and ready. You even told your friends and family about it, and they're watching you.

Finish all the things! Push your game design partners, your graph-

ic artist, and your illustrator to be ready for this week because you might need them to put in some overtime.

Prepare Your Fans

In addition to those outside individuals that you have been diligently working to earn through organic and paid promotion, you now have a pretty significantly sized inside crew of fans that are ready to back your project on day 1. Great!

But you also have another group of people that are even bigger fans - your friends and family.

Many of these people will often back whether or not they play games, because they are supporting *you*. Don't be afraid to mobilize them and tell them exactly how to support your game. They may have never used Kickstarter before, so it's your job to help them get through that and to remind them that their help matters so much to you.

Your next task is to make sure they understand how important it is to support you on **launch day**. Many times, your friends and family will not understand that supporting on that day so you get funded faster makes a difference -- It can make a huge difference, so you have to make sure they are ready to back on your launch day.

I do not advise you to have one family member inject thousands of dollars into your campaign so you "look funded." I have seen it before -- someone funds their campaign on day 1 because of a large backer donation. That is often figured out right away, makes you look untrustworthy, and is against Kickstarter terms to boot.

But this will not be you, because you have done your work to make it happen ahead of time.

You have brought your crowd.

The Calm Before The Storm

Now, whatever happens on launch day, you can be confident that you have done everything in your power to be prepared. You are

about to roll the dice, but you have exacted every bit of agency and control over those dice that you could.

I have worked with many clients, and those who prepare and bring their crowd with them are the ones who consistently fund.

Kickstarter is not a magic box that rewards your miracle of an idea but is instead a rewarder of those who diligently prepare.

And while it is indeed possible that a quickly planned campaign can spiral into a viral success, it is far more common for a diligently planned campaign to earn viral success.

Good luck and godspeed!

Conclusion

I would like to first thank Gabe Barrett of the Board Game Design Lab for inviting me to contribute to this awesome project. Secondly, it was my honor to help you, the reader, with my experience in creating effective marketing systems and answers to difficult questions that my clients commonly grapple against in their Kickstarter journeys.

I hope my contribution, and this book as a whole, becomes a valuable asset to you on your Kickstarter journey. Thus, I hope what you found within this chapter has been a blessing to you. If you have questions and would like to reach out, you are welcome to reach me directly via email at andrew@nextlevelweb.com, or review more details on my company website at Nextlevelweb.com.

Before I end with you all, I would like to share my top takeaways after reflecting on my time writing here:

1. **Marketing is a moving target.** Experience through trying something for yourself is ten times more valuable than when you read in a book. If you remember nothing else from what I have written, your duty is to do something. Let the chips fall where they may and be proud of yourself for working hard.
2. **Help others along your journey, just because you can.**

I have experienced great hardships in life and in business, but when I thought I couldn't press forward, I was carried through the fires by people that cared about me. Oftentimes, they were people that didn't owe me anything, and they chose to aid me out of the kindness of their hearts. I could never repay them for their kindness, so I have chosen to pass my gifts of marketing knowledge forward to you. Please find a way to pass forward what has been entrusted to you for the express purpose of blessing someone that doesn't deserve it. The world needs more of that.

- 3. You can't take it with you.** One day, we will all pass away, and the success of this life cannot be taken with us. I believe that when that time comes we will most certainly wonder why we kept success and possessions in such high esteem when it makes little difference on eternity. So, my encouragement is to work hard, but don't put your stock in temporal success.

From the bottom of my heart, thank you for reading this. If we happen to bump into one another at a convention, make sure you come say hello! If you tell me you read this chapter, my first question to you will be, "What was your #1 takeaway from what you read?"

Until that time...

Kindest regards,

Andrew Lowen

What are social goals? What rewards can you tie to them? When do they work? When do they not work?

Social Goals

Social goals are a specialized form of stretch goal that are specifically designed to encourage backer participation and increase the organic sharing of a project. A clever creator will use social stretch goals to win the right to communicate with their fans and backers through as many mediums as possible.

Examples of this in action:

We unlock a “Social Stretch Goal” when:

- ...the game reaches 500 subscribers on BoardGameGeek.com
- ...the company twitter account gets to 1500 total followers
- ...a specific Facebook Post gets to 100 shares
- ...our Facebook group hits 1800 members
- ...our project hits rank 1 on Kicktraq.com
- ...our email list reaches 900 subscribers

The above are examples that have been used many times by Kickstarter creators, but the chosen objectives, numbers, and total quantity of social goals vary by project. After all, your company will often focus on different mediums of communication than the examples above.

A word of caution to the wise -- social stretch goals that seem too far out or are too numerous may actually discourage backers from participating. If you want to do this right, you need to focus your effort on 1-3 meaningful goals at a time. After all, if they prove popular, you can always reveal more, or offer additional rewards for much higher subscriber/follower counts!

Should you use social stretch goals?

Stretch goals get people excited, and social goals are meant to pile on to the excitement. Some companies have combined the two, others have opted for social goals only, and still others advocate for stretch goals only.

What you cannot afford to do is fail to engage your backers. A 30-day campaign with less than 1 comment per day is an affair that is quickly forgotten. Remaining top of mind will get you into the board game news cycle, will increase your rank on the Kickstarter “discovery” algorithm (for more backers), and will raise a whole lot more money for your campaign!

A social stretch goal is not the only viable way to encourage backer participation and sharing. If you have an excited fanbase, you might want to encourage them to return and check your campaign page or read your updates in a different way! There are many alternatives out there, limited only by your creativity.

Examples of some “social stretch goal” alternatives:

Pit two in-game factions against each other, asking your fans to vote, post on your forum, or play mini-games to earn points.

Set up game puzzles for your fans to solve

Pre-plan and share “secret item/component unlocks” that automatically unlock each day

Share special campaign-focused narrative each day

Ask backers to choose one goal or another

A few campaigns that did a great job with “social stretch goal alternatives” are Trial By Trolley by Skybound Games and Frosthaven by Cephalofair Games. These campaigns were extremely popular and exciting due to their methodology of engaging their backers. Their respective companies are innovating in this area and worth following for great ideas.

What rewards should you offer for social goals?

While social goals can be indirectly tied to earning new backers for your campaign, they do not generate money for your campaign on their own. Thus, rewards for social goals should generally be inexpensive and easy to add without much extra cost. Cardstock is very inexpensive, so if your game includes cards for things like items or characters, this is a great use of social goals. Many times, creators actually pull out components they are intending to include in the game anyway in order to offer a “freebie” to backers. Backers only know what you tell them, and backers appreciate getting stuff! If you give them extra card(s) or an additional character, even if you secretly intended to include it anyway, they will appreciate and find value in that gesture!

Chapter 6: **The Kitchen Sink Checklist**

I'm a big fan of checklists. With so many different moving parts that make up game design and Kickstarter campaigns, they can be super helpful in keeping everything on track and on time.

When I first got into publishing, I developed a “master” checklist that was based on one created by James Mathe found here: james-mathe.com/checklist/

My checklist (found in this chapter) compiles the major phases of bringing a game to market. It helps me to make sure I don't leave anything out, and I've tweaked it a lot as my company has grown and as I've made various mistakes.

Your checklist is obviously going to look a bit different based on your project and the current state of your company.

You'll also notice that the checklist doesn't have timelines. When I'm working on a project, I'll put “six months out,” “thirty days out,” etc based on when the planned Kickstarter launch is. However, these timelines will also be very different depending on the project and state of your company.

For some phases, the timelines for your first campaign will be drastically different from your later campaigns as your social media presence, email list, etc will (hopefully) be in very different places.

I say all of this to preface my checklist with just that: it's my checklist. Please don't feel like your project needs to have the same line items. However, I believe it makes a great place to start, and then you can edit, add to, and remove as necessary.

Also, keep in mind that a lot of the items in each phase aren't in a specific order. For example, it doesn't make much of a difference if you create the Kickstarter intro video before the gameplay video. Many parts of each phase can be done concurrently.

Chapter 6: The Kitchen Sink Checklist

Again, this is only a guide to help make your planning easier.

You can find a digital version of this checklist at: boardgame-designlab.com/checklist

GAME DESIGN	
	Design & Early Playtesting
	Prototype Print & Play w/ Rules
	Hire Developer
	Blind Test Groups
	Create Art Direction Plan
	Hire Artist(s)
	Hire Graphic Designer
	Finalize Rules
	Post in Related Facebook Groups
	Edit Rules
	Create Final Component List w/ Optional Components
	Contact Manufacturers for Quotes (options for upgraded components)
	Research/Contact Potential Pledge Manager Partners
	Research/Contact Potential Shipping & Fulfillment Partners
PRE-MARKETING	
	Create Marketing Plan
	Hire a Marketing Firm
	BoardGameGeek Database Entry
	Create Convention Demo Plan/Calendar
	Final Artwork Print & Play
	Order Nice Prototypes
	Tabletop Simulator Version
	Post in Related Facebook Groups
	Contact Potential Reviewers/Previewers

Board Game Kickstarter Advice

	Contact Content Creators about Potential Interviews (podcasts, blogs, YouTube channels, etc.)
	Send Regular Updates to Email List & on Social Media
	Create a Facebook Event for the Kickstarter Launch
	Demo Copies to Reviewers/Previewers
KICKSTARTER	
	KS Planning w/ Stretch Goals & Shipping
	KS Page w/ Rewards & Graphics
	KS Intro Video
	KS Gameplay Video
	Animated GIFs
	Quotes from Reviewers/Previewers
	Banners & Art for Ads
	Submit Campaign to KS at Least One Week from Launch
	Write answers for the FAQ section on the KS page
	Launch (Go through the KS Launch Day Checklist)
	Fund
	Set Up Pledge Manager
	Post Late Pledge Link on KS Page
	KS Money Transferred
	Pledge Manager Email Sent
MANUFACTURING	
	Update & Sign Final Manufacturer Contract. Paid Down Payment
	Final Mechanical Files Uploaded
	Final Models for 3D Items Sent
	Digital Proofs Approved
	White Box Approved
	Mass Production Copy Approved
	Paid Balance of Manufacturing Bill

Chapter 6: The Kitchen Sink Checklist

	KS Pack-Ins Completed (Exclusives, Fliers, Signed Copies, etc)
	Paid Customs & Shipping
	Product Received
SHIPPING	
	Shipped U.S. Kickstarter Backers
	Shipped International Kickstarter Backers
POST-MARKETING	
	Listed on Company Website
	Listed on Online Retailers (Amazon, CoolStuffInc, etc)
	Post Release Marketing Plan (Conventions, Ads, etc)

Chapter 7:

The Launch Day Checklist

Launch day can be a mess. You'll likely experience every emotion imaginable, and I've found that self-doubt hits its absolute apex shortly before you hit the big, green launch button. So, trust me, you want a checklist.

The checklist I use (found in this chapter) has lots of things that seem rather obvious. However, because launch day is often such a rollercoaster, it's easy to absolutely forget obvious things.

A lot of new creators go into launch day running on very little (if any) sleep, and their diets are usually terrible. Please do everything you can to take care of yourself before the campaign launches as it's going to be really difficult to do so during the campaign.

Almost every creator I interviewed said they struggle to maintain their health during campaigns. So, you'll want to be in top form going in.

Eat a good breakfast. It's easy to forget to eat which can lead to a crash later. Or, if you're like me and struggle with getting hangry, it could lead to unintended snarkiness when answering backer questions. Don't set yourself up to fail.

Take the day off from work if you can. I've launched several campaigns amidst working my day job, and it caused a ton of extra stress. It's much better to not have to worry about all the daily tasks that go with your 9 to 5 while you're also trying to respond to backer comments or fix a mistake on your campaign page.

And just like the Kitchen Sink Checklist in the previous chapter, use my checklist as a starting point. Feel free to add to, change, and take away from it. Also, the order in which you do a lot of it doesn't matter.

If you're fortunate enough to have other people helping with your campaign, you can easily divide up the tasks for others to help carry the load.

Chapter 7: The Launch Day Checklist

Don't forget to breathe, and enjoy launch day as much as you can. If you realize some terrible mistake has been made, don't freak out. Relax and fix it as best you can.

In A.J. Porfirio's interview, he talked about accidentally launching a sixty-day campaign (instead of thirty), so he had to cancel, start over, rebuild the entire campaign page, and relaunch later that day.

If these mistakes can happen to a company that's made millions of dollars on Kickstarter, they can happen to you. So, just roll with it. Solve the problems and overcome the obstacles as they come up.

You can find a digital version of this checklist at: boardgame-designlab.com/launch-day

	Get a good night's sleep
	Eat a good breakfast
	Go over the details of your campaign one last time
	Check all reward levels and shipping numbers again.... and again
	Turn Kickstarter notifications off on your phone
	Create a filter in your email to move Kickstarter emails to a separate folder
	Hit the big, green LAUNCH button
	Send an email to your email list
	Post a link in related Facebook groups
	Post a link on Twitter and pin it to the top of your profile
	Update your website and redirect it to your Kickstarter page
	Post an update on previous Kickstarter campaigns an- nouncing the new project
	Post answers in the FAQ section
	Answer questions and reply to comments as they come in
	Ignore all messages from "companies" that say they can get you more backers
	Breathe

Chapter 8:

Determining Your Funding Goal

Setting the right funding goal is extraordinarily important, especially for a new creator. Set it too high, and backers will shy away because they don't think you'll reach it. Set it too low, and backers will shy away because they don't trust it.

People like to back a winner, so you want to do everything you can to hit your funding goal on the first day or at least in the first forty-eight hours. This will create a snowball effect that will hopefully lead to overfunding by a large margin, so you want to have a goal that's attainable.

The lower you set the funding goal, the more likely you are to reach it early. However, many creators are listing unreasonably low funding goals, which leads to backers being skeptical of the project and less likely to back.

If you're just starting out, hopefully you're doing a smaller project that doesn't require a substantial amount of money to fund. If your first project is a \$100 game full of plastic miniatures, you're going to have a much more difficult time than if it's a \$20 card game.

So, first of all, make sure your project isn't beyond the scope of the audience you've built up or the trust you have with them. It's better to start small and build up to larger, more expensive projects down the road.

But, how do you determine the right funding goal?

My Mistake

When I first started out, I fell into the same trap a lot of new creators fall into, and I based my funding goal on printing way too many copies of the game. People told me that it was best to print at least 2500 copies to take advantage of the best price breaks.

However, when you're just starting out, 2500 games is likely way too many. Hopefully, your game turns out to be a hit, and you end up needing to print way more than that, but more than likely the number of copies you'll need is much lower.

My campaign failed in part because the funding goal was too high which prevented the game from picking up momentum. People are much more likely to back a game that's already funded, so if your campaign is struggling to hit its goal after the first couple of days, you're going to have a tough road in front of you.

So, for the relaunch, I reached out to some more manufacturers and found ones that would print 500 copies. The price per copy wasn't nearly as good, but the total amount I needed was much lower, which meant I could have a much lower funding goal.

And thanks in part to the lower funding goal, my project picked up more momentum during the relaunch, funded on the second day, and ended up with nearly twice as many backers as it had the first time around. Again, people like to back a winner.

Calculating the Numbers

To determine your funding goal, there are three main numbers to calculate: **production**, **shipping**, and **fees**.

Production

For production, start off with the manufacturing cost. If your game costs \$10 per copy, and you have to print a minimum of 500 copies, your initial cost is \$5,000.

You may also want to include the art and graphic design costs here, however, many creators view these as sunk costs and don't include them in their funding goal (more on this in a moment). But if your game requires a substantial amount of art, you'll likely need to include that in the funding goal.

You'll have to pay for a certain amount of art and graphic design before the campaign begins, so it's up to you whether you try to

recoup those costs in the funding goal. (To keep the funding goal lower, I wouldn't include those costs.)

Let's assume that your art and graphic design costs are \$2,000, so your current funding goal is now \$7,000.

Shipping to You

For shipping, first, you need to calculate the cost to get the game from the manufacturer to the distribution center(s) (or your house). For this, you'll need to talk to your factory to find out how much they charge to get the games to the port (assuming they provide that service), and you'll need to talk to a shipping company to figure out the price to get the games from the port to the distribution center(s).

If your game is going to be available to backers around the world, it's going to cost different amounts to get games to different regions, so after talking to your shipping company, determine the average cost and round up just to be on the safe side.

Let's assume that it costs \$3 per copy to get your game to the distribution center(s) which is \$1,500 total. So, now we're up to an \$8,500 funding goal.

Shipping to Backers

Next, if you're going to charge for shipping through the Kickstarter campaign, you need to calculate that cost. (Whether to charge through Kickstarter or a pledge manager after the campaign is discussed in detail in chapter 18.) Charging through a pledge manager makes calculating your funding goal a bit easier as you don't have to deal with each backer's shipping cost counting towards the total funding amount.

Figuring out how much shipping to backers will affect your funding goal can be a difficult number to calculate, and it's going to require a bit of estimating. Do some research on campaigns similar to yours, especially ones from new creators, and average out the number of total backers. Don't include mega hits in your calculations as they're outliers and will throw off your numbers.

Then, throw your email list numbers and audience size into the mix to estimate how many backers you think you'll have.

Let's assume you'll have 300 backers, and shipping to each one will cost \$12 on average. You'll want to assume this number will be higher just to build in a buffer, so let's call it \$15 each which is \$4,500 total.

Now, the funding goal is \$13,000. (If you charge for shipping in the pledge manager, you can leave this cost off your funding goal.)

Kickstarter Fees

After the campaign, Kickstarter and credit card processing are going to take roughly 10% of your total funding goal right off the top. So, if you make \$100,000, only expect to receive about \$90,000 in your bank account.

Make sure to calculate this into your funding goal. Basically, after you figure out how much you need to make the project happen, add 10% to it.

Friendly Shipping Fees

Friendly shipping is when the publisher pays the extra taxes (VAT or GST) for international orders instead of the backers. If you want to offer friendly shipping to different countries around the world, you'll also need to factor in these extra fees.

Customs Fees

And you'll need to talk to your shipping company to factor in the customs fees for bringing the games into your own country.

Let's assume that these costs will be \$2,000, which brings the funding goal up to \$15,000.

Other Costs to Keep in Mind

If you're offering a deluxe version of your game, it's going to affect your shipping numbers, so make sure to factor that in.

Also, if your campaign has stretch goals, make sure to account for how they could affect your numbers, especially when it comes to the weight of your game and the subsequent shipping costs. There are quite a few horror stories about creators who didn't calculate stretch goals into their funding numbers and it cost them thousands of dollars later.

Dropped Backers

Your campaign is likely to have a small percentage of backers whose credit cards don't process for various reasons when the campaign closes. To be on the safe side, I estimate 3% of a campaign's backers will drop which could turn into a decent amount of money for a larger campaign.

These dropped backers likely won't affect your project much, but if you just barely hit your funding goal, it means you're going to have to pay more out of pocket to actually complete the game.

Buffer

Then, after everything, make sure you add a little more money on the top just to act as a buffer in case some of your numbers or estimates turned out to be on the low side. For a small project, add at least \$1,000 on the top.

That puts our example project up to a \$16,000 funding goal.

Your Own Contributions

Alright, so your funding goal is \$16,000, but maybe you've been setting aside birthday money and selling plasma on the weekends so that you've got \$3,000 that you're willing to put into the project if necessary. In that case, you could drop the funding goal down to \$13,000.

The Sunk Cost Fallacy

Sunk cost is an economics term that references when a cost has already been incurred and cannot be recovered. The Sunk Cost Fallacy is when you make decisions based on trying to recoup that

cost. You might buy a big meal at a restaurant and, though you are full after eating half, finish everything on your plate because you didn't want to waste it. That isn't helpful for your waistline, but it is a common way to think about your investments.

Sunk cost is one of the biggest reasons a board game creator will make bad decisions. A common pre-Kickstarter error is when a creator hires an artist too early, and they are hesitant to change a component that is holding their game back because they would have to get rid of the art.

Appropriate Funding Goals

Your funding goal should not reflect your sunk costs. Costs that you incurred that you cannot recover should be expected in business. They are investments in yourself and your company, and they are almost certainly required in the process leading up to a Kickstarter effort.

Your funding goal can have a drastic effect on your ability to fund and your project's potential to overfund. Let's get something straight here: I want you to *overfund*. You need to overfund if you want your projects to spread like wildfire into stores and tens of thousands of dining room tables all over the world. But you will have a hard time doing that if your initial funding goal is too high!

However, let's be clear on one thing: I am not advocating for artificially low funding goals that would cause you to take a substantial loss on the manufacturing and freight costs of making the game. What I am advocating for is to "trim the fat" of sunk costs and to use tried-and-true funding formulas to arrive at the necessary cost to get you from your current point to making the game a reality.

Therefore, when calculating your goals for funding, do not try to recoup 100% of your investment in your initial funding goal. Those are just the costs of running a Kickstarter based business.

Conclusion

To figure out your funding goal, calculate every single cost that goes into bringing the project to life. For the parts you have to estimate, always estimate higher than you think it'll be, and build in a buffer just in case. Do your homework. Ignore your sunk costs. Then, decide if you're willing to put more of your own money in.

Dot the i's, cross the t's, and carry the one, and you'll have your funding goal!

Chapter 9:

Creating Reward Levels

Selling anything comes down to one thing: the value proposition. Basically, when a potential customer sees what you're selling, they immediately form an idea about what that thing is worth. Then, they compare their idea to the actual price.

If the price is less than what they think it should cost, they're more likely to buy it. If the price is more than what they think it should cost, they're more likely to pass.

Whether you're selling a new car, a cleaning service, or a game on Kickstarter, you have to create the right value proposition to make sales. But you also want to maximize your profit, so you need to price your product as close to its perceived value as possible but just low enough that people think it's worth the money.

You could easily sell a million copies of Gloomhaven if you priced them at \$20 each. However, that wouldn't be a particularly winning strategy as you'd go out of business. You could price them at \$300 each and make a large profit, but very few people would think it was worth that amount. But at \$100 each, tens of thousands of people will pull out their credit cards, and you'll make a lot of money in the process.

But how do you figure out the right price for your rewards, and what rewards should you even offer as a new creator? Well, it's a bit of an art and a science.

The 5X Rule

If you ask about reward pricing online, you'll almost immediately hear people telling you to price your game at 5X the manufacturing cost. If it costs \$10 to produce your game, then it should cost \$50 to buy.

This isn't a bad strategy, and it's honestly a great rule of thumb,

but please don't blindly price your game at 5X without thinking through all the variables in play.

The 5X rule originates from a time long before Kickstarter was a thing. Publishers would print a game and sell it to distributors that would then sell it to retail stores. Everyone in that trifecta has to make money to stay in business, so the 5X rule created a system that worked for all parties.

The publisher could sell to the distributor at 2X. The distributor could sell to the retailers at 3X. And the retailers could sell to customers at 5X.

(That's a very rough explanation of the system, and some companies would aim for 6X-8X to maximize profits. But that's basically how it would work and still works for a lot of companies today.)

So, the idea is that since you're selling directly to consumers, you should go ahead and price your game at 5X the manufacturing cost.

But as a new creator, the odds of getting your games into distribution are basically zero. And except for the handful of retailers that back your Kickstarter campaign, your game likely won't make it to many store shelves either.

So, use that to your advantage, and price your game without having to worry about some imaginary 5X target number. Depending on the project, 3X might make more sense. Or it could be 8X. You'll just have to think through all the variables to determine what makes the most sense. And just realize that a lot of backers are looking for a deal, so pricing your game lower than the MSRP (or perceived MSRP) may bring in a lot more people.

Print Size

If you only print 500 games, your cost per copy might be \$10 depending on the size and complexity of the game. Following the 5X rule means you should charge \$50.

But what if you print 2500 copies which drops the cost per game down to \$7 each. Should the price of the game now be \$35?

No, the price of the game should be determined by the game's overall value proposition. How much does a consumer think the game is worth? Price it just below that.

Art

When I say pricing a game is an art, I actually mean that literally. The more amazing your game looks, the higher its perceived value will be and the more people will be willing to pay for it.

If two games are identical except one is ugly and one is beautiful, the beautiful one is worth more. Period. Humans are visual creatures and ascribe value to things based first and foremost on their appearance.

So, if you want to be able to charge more for your game, make sure it looks great. (And make sure the marketing looks great.)

Science

The science of pricing a game comes through research. More than likely, there have been quite a few games on Kickstarter that are similar to yours. How much did they cost?

If you have a big, epic miniatures game, the going rate is \$99. That's the box you live in right now. If you try to charge \$149, you're going to have to provide a lot more than just \$50 worth of extra value. People are very used to paying \$99, so \$149 is actually a much bigger leap than you may realize. You might have to provide \$199 worth of value to get people to pay \$149.

To stand out, you might charge \$89 or even less and try to balance receiving less profit per sale with bringing in a lot more sales overall. But if you're a new creator, the lower price might also bring in skepticism if the price is too low compared to what backers think the game should cost.

If they value the game at \$99, and it only costs \$69, they might think you don't actually know what you're doing and might keep their credit cards firmly stowed in their wallets. So, be careful about get-

ting too far outside the norm when you're just starting out.

Once you've built up a track record and an audience that trusts you and knows you're going to deliver on what you promise, you can start diverging from the norms. But understand the box you're in before trying to jump out of it.

Do the Research

Find at least five games similar to yours that have been successful in the last two years. And in this case, similar is referring to: components, theme, playtime, art style, company size, etc. You hopefully won't find an exact match for all those things, and if you do, you might want to reconsider launching a redundant game, but you'll find enough games to get some averages.

How much are people willing to pay for games similar to yours? That should be the basis for determining your reward levels.

Can you offer more value for the same price? Can you offer the same value for less? How does your game set itself apart from the games that have come before it?

Less Is More

Don't offer too many reward levels. There are exceptions, of course, but as a general rule, don't offer more than five. More than five can get confusing to backers, and as confusion goes up, sales go down.

So, keep the language of each reward level very clear. This is not a time to be clever or cute. Make it very obvious what a backer gets at each level. Brevity is your friend.

Different Reward Types

The \$1 Level

Kickstarter's system gives backers the option of pledging any amount of money to a campaign without selecting a reward, so people can easily gift you a dollar if they so choose. However, backers at rest stay at rest, so you'll do a lot better if you make it easy for

them to give you that dollar by creating a reward tier for it.

And there are a lot of reasons why someone might want to back at this level. Some people just want to see updates or to show their support for your campaign but don't actually want the game. Some people want access to the pledge manager to be able to buy the game later. Some people have a lot of followers on Kickstarter and will back your game for a buck so all of their followers get notified about the project.

There's no reason not to have a \$1 reward level. It doesn't cost you anything, and it might actually lead to more sales.

The Multiple Game Level

On several campaigns, I've received messages from potential backers who wanted a reward level with multiple copies of the game so that they could go in together with a friend to save on shipping. So, it's a good idea to have one of these levels, and if you can knock a few dollars off the price to make it even more of a deal, it'll go a long way with backers.

Just don't screw up the shipping cost, especially if the bundle is available to international backers.

The Retailer Level

If you want to fund your Kickstarter and really support your post-Kickstarter campaign sales, you would be well advised to consider retailers in your plans. There are thousands of retailers spread across the world that could order your games, and they each have their own captive audiences and marketing efforts in place. You could find great value in spreading the word through retailers after your Kickstarter campaign is concluded

Many companies put a retailer tier in place, but there are many pitfalls to consider here that might scare retailers off. The more favorable terms you give to the retailer, the more likely they will back your project!

Some of the big ones you'll want to consider are:

- **Keystone pricing.** They want your game at 50% MSRP so they can sell it for full MSRP. Don't ruin this by deeply discounting your product on Kickstarter; a small discount is fine.
- **Delayed payment.** Retailers have their cash flow to consider. If you ask them to buy six copies of your game and pay the full price for them now, when they won't be able to sell them until they arrive a year later, they will be less than enthusiastic. Fix this by asking for a small % of the full cost, and have them pay for the rest right before shipping it to them. More will be on board for that, as it means a shorter cycle for them to recoup their investment.
- **Stretch Goals Included.** Retailers want the same copies as you are giving to a backer, which means that you need to include full stretch goals. You might make a deluxe edition and then also have a standard retail edition, but chances are that retailers are going to want that deluxe hotness. Don't short-change them here!
- **Something Extra With More Investment.** Retailers are always looking for a good deal. (Something like an extra demo copy or free shipping if they buy at least X games. Or a retailer-exclusive promo card that will entice people to come into their stores and grab a copy when it gets buzz for launching at retail.)

Beware of deep-discount online retailers. If you sell to a company that undercuts everyone by a deep margin (or if you do that yourself), your retailers will probably put your product on clearance and never buy from you again. Do your best to always consider the impact your decisions have on your retailers if you're going that route.

It's also a good idea to vet people who back at this level to make sure they really are retailers. It's rare, but sometimes people try

to get a good deal when they don't actually have a store. To confirm they're legit, you can ask for a tax ID number or some other type of identification.

For my own campaigns, I view this level as less about making money and more about getting the game out there. As a new creator without access to distribution, anything that gets your game in the hands of customers who have never heard of you is probably a good thing. Hopefully, they like your game and become backers for your next project.

The Custom Component Level

A great way to give backers a chance to really be part of bringing the game to life (and make more money in the process) is to offer reward levels that allow backers to be part of the game in some way.

Maybe they get to name a planet or character. Maybe they get to have their face on a card. Or maybe they get to design an entire faction. There are lots of options that some backers will pay a premium for.

Some backers really enjoy being able to open the box and show all of their friends the card they contributed to. And when you're just starting out, having this option can bring in a decent chunk of money. If you're selling a \$20 game and offer ten spots to name a planet for \$100 each, you'd make \$800 more from selling the same number of games (assuming all spots get filled).

This is also a great way for friends and family members to support your project for more than just the cost of the game and get a cool opportunity to contribute to your game in return.

You should definitely put some restrictions on what's acceptable and make those restrictions very clear upfront. And make sure there's a disclaimer about you having to approve every idea that gets submitted.

But you have to be okay with giving up a bit of creative control. Once the game is printed, it'll have cards, factions, etc that you didn't

name or design, and that has to be alright with you. If you feel uneasy about that idea, don't offer these kinds of rewards. There's also a potential for delays as some backers just forget to get back to you, so make sure you also set a time limit for contributions.

Early Bird Rewards

Let me start off by saying there's nothing wrong with having reward levels in which backers get a discounted price by backing early. This is a method a lot of campaigns have used to bring in early funding that they then tried to turn into momentum throughout the rest of the campaign.

However, if you look online, you'll find a lot of strong opinions about early birds, so make sure you're aware of the downsides.

First of all, a LOT of people absolutely hate them. There's a large group of backers who won't back a game at all, even at the early bird price, because they dislike the concept so much. And a lot of other people won't back the game if they can't get the early bird price as it annoys them that some people paid less than them for the same product.

Second of all, you're costing yourself a good bit of money. The people who back your game in the first few days are typically your most avid fans, so they would have backed the game even if it didn't have an early bird discount.

So, again, there's nothing inherently wrong with early bird reward levels, but just realize there are some drawbacks to consider. You'll likely be better off having a "flash funding goal" (discussed in chapter 14) or offering a limited time reward (discussed below) to entice backers to pledge during the first few days of your campaign.

Free Add-On Early Birds

This is when you offer a free item added to your main pledge tiers for a limited time (typically 24-72 hrs). The items are typically a vanity item like a Unicorn headband, a cool alternate mini sculpt, or even something functional to gameplay like an extra character card.

This is also to encourage backers to jump in early, but instead of giving them a discount on the product, you give them something of value to thank them for coming in early.

Some backers may get upset that they didn't discover the campaign in time, but learning that others got a free item that is non-essential to gameplay won't automatically turn them off as quickly as discovering the game used to be a cheaper price. It's also easy for you to make the item an add-on that they can purchase for a low price (\$10 or less) in a post-campaign Pledge Manager.

This works! While you will certainly have some explaining to do to the occasional irate backer, it is a lot easier to justify to a backer that you had a dedicated fanbase that you wanted to thank for sticking around. After all, if that backer gets notified of your next campaign and jumps on board, they'll get the free thing, too.

Limited Number Rewards

Maybe you want to offer a really cool version of your game that comes with a handmade box. Or maybe you're going to sign and number the first 100 games. There are lots of options for rewards that have a limited supply, and they can be another great way for backers to feel special and for you to make a bit more money.

However, if this reward sells out quickly, you might be tempted to increase the number available to maximize your sales. But do this carefully and only after running it by your backers. Changing a reward level like this may water down the reward and could possibly create trust issues between you and your backers.

You don't want to seem like you're just trying to squeeze money out of people, so if a reward was supposed to have a limited supply, you probably want to stick to that number.

One way around this, though, is if you create a new reward level that ships later than the original. For example, if you have a reward level that comes with a custom, handmade box that sells out, you could create another reward level for the same thing that ships two months later.

Having limited supply rewards can be a great way for backers to feel special and pay extra for something no one else has. And when you're just starting out, this kind of reward gives backers a chance to feel like they're helping a new creator/company get off the ground.

Kickstarter Exclusive Rewards

A "Kickstarter Exclusive" item is most often a stretch goal that will not be included in the retail edition of the game and is specifically meant to drive momentum in a campaign. It should also be noted that entire projects may be "Kickstarter Exclusive" and not available for retail. In some cases, games that are Kickstarter Exclusive are only available on the secondary market from a backer that got in early and is re-selling their copy.

Retailers love when you include them in these reward tiers -- don't forget to make sure the retailer gets all the goodies that normal backers get. They will show their appreciation for you by buying your stuff!

Permanent Exclusivity

Many times, a "Kickstarter Exclusive" reward is specifically meant to give backers FOMO (the Fear Of Missing Out) -- this powerful phenomenon causes people to back and hold onto games they might not normally be into and convinces backers to keep a pledge they might have otherwise canceled.

Keep in mind that a lot of backers are very opposed to Kickstarter exclusives, especially if they affect gameplay in any way. (Things like variant box covers or variant art don't bother people as much.) However, in the right situation, exclusives can make for a much stronger mid-campaign performance and a more momentous campaign finish.

The problem is that after the campaign, you have all this great content that you printed that you are not allowed to sell on your website (or face the wrath of your backers).

Limited Exclusivity

Companies nowadays are starting to wise up to the negative side of permanent exclusivity and are trending toward limited exclusivity.

This means that if someone misses out on the Kickstarter campaign but really wants the exclusive item, they can find a way to get their hands on it from the publisher (not just on the secondary market).

Publishers will often carry special copies of this exclusive item to give away or sell at conventions or on their web store “while supplies last.” In addition, they may say there is a period of limited exclusivity where they won’t allow this reward to be available until six months to a year after this product is released to the public.

This may be the better option for your company so you’re not sitting on a product that you aren’t allowed to sell. You are running a business after all!

Print & Play Rewards

The Print & Play files of your game are something a prospective backer can use to print and play your game before buying into the full copy. Nevermind that they will probably spend more money on ink than what it costs to buy your game, some backers really find this a wonderful thing! In fact, there are many that would love to get your game that cannot afford it due to being in a country with high shipping and customs fees. So, you can satisfy these backers with a Print & Play tier of your game

These tiers should be anywhere from \$4-10 USD depending on the size of the game. This is a section that I would advise to charge on the higher end of that spectrum if your art costs or components were substantial. A “PnP” of a small box game is generally of less value than one of a bog box game.

You should make both low and high-resolution versions of your Print & Play available. It is also my recommendation that you make the low-res version a free download before and during your Kickstarter campaign to provide some proof that your game is worth-

while. There will be people that back your game based on their experience with the low-res PnP.

For more info on how to create an excellent PnP file, check out this podcast episode: boardgamedesignlab.com/martin

Other Rewards

It can be tempting to offer rewards that don't have anything to do with your game such as t-shirts, plushies, etc. I want to caution you away from this kind of thing (especially t-shirts). You're going to have enough to figure out and do just to get the game delivered on time. The last thing you need is a side project taking up more of your bandwidth.

They make your project more expensive and are rarely a good return on investment. I know it would be cool to see a bunch of people wearing shirts with your logo on them, but it's typically not worth the extra time, money, and energy.

Add-Ons

If you look at a lot of campaigns, you'll notice that many of them have "add-ons" that can be added to a backer's reward. These are usually items that a person can pay extra for and receive with their game, but it doesn't make sense to create a reward level for this combination.

Sometimes companies will offer their other games as add-ons. Other times, they'll offer gaming supplements like playmats and card sleeves. It can really be anything that a backer might want to receive alongside the game.

Add-ons are handled fairly easily with a pledge manager after the campaign finishes though (which you can learn more about in chapter 17), so it's often easier and less confusing to let backers know those items will be available through the pledge manager later and roughly how much they will cost.

Chapter 10:

When to Launch a Campaign

I see the question “When should I launch my campaign?” constantly, so I figured it was a necessary chapter for this book. Now, keep in mind that there is no magical answer or silver bullet for when you hit the launch button. If your game is a good product for the Kickstarter market, you’ll succeed. And if it’s not...you’re going to struggle.

The first day of your campaign is obviously of the utmost importance, and if you’re a first-time creator, it could be the difference between funding and not. However, don’t overthink things. You’re better off spending more time on your campaign page than trying to do the calculus of the perfect time to go live.

I suggest letting the data be your guide for when to launch. We have more than a decade of Kickstarter successes and failures to learn from, and while there are plenty of outliers, following the general path to success is a good idea (especially when you’re just starting out).

The following advice is based on data from over 300,000 campaigns outlined in this video: boardgamedesignlab.com/launch

Month

The month you choose is largely unimportant. December is the only month that has noticeably fewer projects and fewer backers, but the rest of the months are mostly the same. Technically, May has the most backers, but it’s only by a small margin.

Overall, March typically has the most projects, so you may want to avoid that month if you’re a new creator. But again, the numbers aren’t that much different month-to-month.

December is an interesting month that is much quieter than the other months because of the Christmas holidays. People typically want to spend money on items they can receive (and probably

give) immediately and are less likely to buy something they won't receive for several months.

However, because there are fewer projects, it may be easier to stand out. I once ran a campaign that failed to fund in October but then had almost double the backers and succeeded a couple of months later in December. So, it definitely can be done.

Another thing to think about is what part of the month you're launching/ending. People usually have more money around the first and fifteenth days of the month and are more likely to buy things then.

Day

Tuesday has become the primary Kickstarter launch day for board games. Mondays and Wednesdays can work too, but the later you get in the week, the more trouble you'll have bringing in early backers.

There's a huge dropoff over the weekend, so avoid Saturday and Sunday at all costs.

Tuesday became the day of choice because it's early in the week but typically less busy for potential backers than Monday. And after a lot of established companies started launching campaigns on Tuesdays, it just picked up momentum as the best day to launch.

(It also gives content creators an extra day to finish up preview videos and whatnot, so that can be helpful as well.)

Now, I've seen a lot of new creators discuss online whether it's better for them to launch on a different day than everyone else because it might give them a better chance to stand out. That's not a bad theory, but I look at it like the food court in the mall.

When someone steps into the food court, they're obviously hungry and ready to buy something to eat. Maybe they walk in looking for Chinese food, but then they notice a sandwich shop that offers some delicious looking meals. Now, if that sandwich shop was on the other side of the mall, it wouldn't have been noticed.

And the great thing about Kickstarter (compared to the food court) is that backers don't buy just one game and feel full. If they get on the platform looking to buy a certain game and then see yours as well, there's a chance they'll buy both. It's just something to keep in mind.

But again, if you've really done the groundwork to build up an audience before you launch, and you have a great product, the day of the week isn't going to matter as much. One of the biggest campaigns I ever backed was for a Dungeons & Dragons supplement, and it launched on a Friday afternoon. When it went live, I thought, "Wow, what a terrible time to launch." But \$2 million later, I had to eat my words.

Time

Based on the data from successful campaigns, the sweet spot is 8 AM Eastern time. This time has the most backers by a decent margin (9 AM has a lot of success as well), and launching this early gives you a greater chance to show up in Kickstarter's "New & Noteworthy" section which can bring in even more backers.

Backer numbers steadily decline after 8 AM and go way down as you get into the late afternoon and evening.

Again, this isn't something to stress over, and if you end up having to push back your launch a few hours it won't have some catastrophic effect. Just try to set up in the "food court" as close to 8 AM as you can.

Length

Back in the day (which is about two years ago in Kickstarter time), a thirty-day campaign was the gold standard. However, since the vast majority of campaigns experience a substantial mid-campaign slump, and most funding comes in during the first three days and final three days of a campaign, many creators have switched to running much shorter campaigns.

At this point, a lot of successful campaigns are closer to three weeks long. Many of the creators I interviewed said shortening their campaigns has really just shortened the slump in the middle and hasn't affected total funding.

If you're a new creator, and you haven't built up much of an audience before launching, you may want to run a longer campaign to give your project more time to be discovered. However, don't go much longer than thirty days as it creates the perception with backers that you don't know what you're doing.

My suggestion is to run a twenty-three day campaign.

Final Day

The day your campaign ends isn't quite as important as the day it begins, but you still want to set yourself up for success. And some of the same concepts apply.

Don't end a campaign on a Tuesday as this is the best day for new backers to potentially discover your campaign. Don't end it on a weekend. And don't end it in the middle of the night.

Keep in mind that backers who have hit the "Remind Me" button on your campaign page will receive an email with a link to your project forty-eight hours before it ends. So, ending in the middle of the night means they'll receive the email in the middle of the night.

A lot of successful campaigns end on Thursday evenings, and that's what I would suggest for yours as well.

Seasonal Games

If you have a seasonal game, one about Halloween or Christmas for example, it can be tempting to run your campaign so that the game delivers in time for backers to play it on that holiday or during that season.

However, please keep in mind that people are more likely to buy a seasonal game during that season than they are to buy it to have for that season. In other words, launch your Christmas themed game in December, not June.

Holidays

In general, you don't want to launch or end a campaign during or around a major holiday as people typically aren't near their computers during those times, and they're more likely to be traveling or spending time with family than scrolling through Kickstarter.

Conclusion

Based on the data, run a twenty-three day campaign that begins on a Tuesday at 8AM Eastern time and ends on a Thursday afternoon. And avoid December.

Chapter 11:

The Importance of Reviews and Previews

One of the most important aspects of a campaign page, and something that can truly make or break a project, is having third party reviews and previews of your game. Backers want to see if other, preferably unbiased, people think your game is any good. They likely won't be able to play the game themselves before backing, so these reviews and previews help them determine if the game is actually worth buying.

If you want to fund, having this type of content on your campaign page is absolutely vital, and this is something you should definitely not overlook.

Review vs Preview

The main difference between a review and a preview is money. If you pay someone to check out your game and post about it online, that's a preview. If someone makes a video or writes an article about your game and doesn't receive any kind of compensation (other than maybe a free copy of the game), that's a review.

Most of what you see on campaign pages falls into the preview category, and backers fully understand that. Just make sure you're clear about it.

How Many Is Enough?

One of the main reasons many campaigns fail is from a lack of reviews/previews. If you don't have at least one, you're almost guaranteed to have a hard time building trust with backers, especially as a new creator.

With that said, it can be expensive to hire a bunch of content creators to make videos about your game, so if your marketing budget

is limited, you want to make sure to be as efficient as possible.

And while there is no magic number, my advice is to have at least **three** videos on your campaign page when you launch.

It can also be a good idea to post a few more over the course of your campaign, especially as you go through the mid-campaign slump. This will bring more potential backers to the page, and hopefully you've already funded by then.

Why They're Important

Having these videos (and articles to a somewhat lesser degree) brings your campaign credibility and shows that you know what you're doing. It lets backers know you're trustworthy and that you're active in the gaming community and not just trying to make money on an unvetted project.

However, more importantly, reviews and previews give you the opportunity to unlock a much larger audience than you currently have access to. In other words, it gets your project in front of a lot more people than just those on your email list.

And for this reason, preview video costs should be built into your marketing budget from the very beginning. For many campaigns, these videos are the most effective method of getting the word out to a broader group of people.

Finding a Good Match

When trying to determine which content creators to contact, the best thing to do is assess the types of games they typically look at. Some focus on solo games. Some focus on heavy Euro games. Some focus on family weight games. Etc.

For one thing, you don't want to waste time pursuing someone who won't be interested in your game. But you mainly want to make sure your game is getting in front of an audience of people who will actually back your project.

Subscriber count and average views are the next most important

things to look at. You obviously want your game to be seen by as many people as possible, however, previewers with larger audiences tend to be more expensive, so just keep that in mind.

When to Contact

This will vary based on the reviewer/previewer's popularity and workload, but generally, you want to contact someone no later than eight weeks before your launch date. You might be able to get on the schedule later than that, but this is definitely not something you want done last-minute.

Just remember that they have to receive your game, learn how to play it, play it a few times, record a video, edit the video, and then post it online. And yours is likely not the only game they're doing this for. So, give them as much time as possible to get things done.

When you initially contact a content creator, they'll typically give you a deadline for when they need to receive your game and a timeline for roughly how long everything will take.

What to Send

Just like everything else on your Kickstarter page, you want the reviews/previews to look excellent. Part of this will be in the hands of the person making the video, and hopefully you're working with someone whose content has high production values. But make sure you're sending them the best possible version of your game to show on camera.

Again, this is part of your marketing strategy, so you want all of those people who have never heard of your game to see it in their YouTube feed and be enticed enough to check out your campaign.

It's fine if all the art isn't finished (just have some good looking placeholder art/icons), and people know that everything is subject to change because it's a prototype. But do everything you can to send the best possible version of your game.

And this includes the rulebook. You're basically sending your game off for a blind playtest that will be seen by thousands of people on

the internet. Make sure the rulebook is polished and clear so that the person making the video doesn't make mistakes (or worse, play the game wrong and dislike it).

When to Post Videos

There are a couple of different strategies for when to post videos. Some creators have all of the review/preview content on the campaign page from day one and ask the video-makers to broadcast their videos on the day the campaign launches.

This is good for getting a lot of eyeballs on your campaign right when it kicks off which will hopefully lead to a super successful first few days.

Another strategy is to launch with a few videos (no less than three), and then post more as the campaign goes along. This is good for bringing new backers to your page during the middle of your campaign when things tend to slow down.

I've seen both strategies work, so it really just depends on your particular marketing strategy. If you've done a good job at building up an audience before you launch, you might want to save some preview videos for later in your campaign. But if you've struggled with pre-marketing, you might want to have all of your videos go live on day one.

The right answer will depend on the project.

Quotes

Another great thing about reviews and previews is that they give you lots of great quotes you can put on your campaign page. During a video, if the reviewer says, "This is the best deduction game I've played in the last three years!", you should definitely turn that quote into a graphic and post it somewhere prominent on your page with the reviewer's name and or picture next to it.

So, when the videos come in, be sure to go through them and listen carefully for soundbites you can turn into testimonial graphics.

Where to Find Reviewers and Previewers

Here's a giant list of content creators who you may want to consider contacting to review or preview your game. Many do content for Kickstarter creators while others are good for sending your game after its been manufactured and is available for sale.

boardgamedesignlab.com/reviewers

Chapter 12:

The Campaign Page

Marketing is the most important aspect of a Kickstarter campaign. If no one knows about your project, your odds of success are slim to none. However, if you don't have a great looking campaign page, a lot of your marketing efforts will be a waste of time.

If Kickstarter was a baseball game, your marketing efforts would be the starting pitcher that comes out and pitches eight solid innings. Then, it's time to call in the closer. It's time to bring in the guy who throws 100mph heat to finish out the game and bring home the win. And the closer is your campaign page.

Your marketing got people excited. They signed up for your email list and commented on your social media posts. They told their friends about the game and set aside money in their monthly budget. They're ready to push that "Back Now" button on day one.

And it's your campaign page's job to prove to them that their excitement is well-founded. It's the first payoff that tells them your game and your company are legit. (The second and bigger payoff comes later when they actually receive and play your game.)

So, to figure out how to create amazing campaign pages, let's look at one of the most legit Kickstarter creators out there: Roxley Games. You'll notice in the interviews that Roxley was mentioned several times as the company to study and emulate when it comes to campaign pages. Every campaign they run is a master class on how to do things well. And you'll notice all of the following aspects show up on their pages.

But it's not just about the content. Everything they do also looks excellent. The graphic design, the art, the animations, the videos; every part is eye-catching from top to bottom.

And whether it's fair or not, your campaign page will be judged next to theirs. So, make sure yours stacks up as best you can. You

probably don't have their budget, but you can still create a page that's clear, attractive, and professional.

Main Image

This image will appear at the top of your page and as the campaign's thumbnail, so it has to hook people in immediately. Many companies put the game's cover art as the image. Many others will put a 3d game box alongside the game's coolest component, typically a plastic miniature or game piece not found in other games.

A lot of creators used to put shipping badges to let backers know they shipped to different regions of the world, but as international shipping has become more commonplace, fewer creators do that now.

A lot of creators used to put "Funded in X hours!" on the image after they funded, but Kickstarter frowns upon that practice, so very few creators still do it.

Make sure the text is clear and can be easily read even as a thumbnail on a phone-sized screen. And make sure the image stands out and hooks backers in. This image may be the only opportunity you have to entice a potential backer as they scroll through the seemingly endless feed of live projects.

It should represent your game as a whole, and be aware that many people don't read the title of the project or its blurb while scrolling. Your main image will need to do all the heavy lifting in getting people to click on it to learn more.

Campaign Video

This video is at the very top of your campaign page and should represent the art, gameplay, and theme of your game. You don't have to have a campaign video, but that will cost you a lot of backers. Not having a video seems lazy and like you're not fully invested in the project.

Think of the video as your game's Super Bowl commercial. You have a short amount of time to convey your product and entice

people to learn more. Most backers want the video to last less than two minutes, so you need to be very efficient with your content. And definitely don't go over five minutes in length. Shorter is better.

If you're not good at creating videos, hire a professional. This isn't a place to cut corners. If you're looking to run a very humble campaign where you know you'll only have a few hundred backers or less, it might make sense to not spend \$1,000 on a video, but if you want your campaign to scale up to a considerable backer count, this is money well spent.

Use the video to show how great the art looks, show a bit about gameplay, and show some things about the game's story or world. Show the elements of your game that make it fun and make it stand out.

You'll be able to use the video again on your website to help sell the game when it comes out, so keep that in mind as well.

Game Setup

Backers love seeing what the game looks like spread out on a table. Whether it's a 3d image or an actual picture, they want to see how all the pieces, cards, and boards look when they're set up and ready for play.

Many gamers have been in the hobby so long that they can get a really good feel for your game just by seeing it laid out. And never underestimate the power of table presence to draw gamers in. So, don't just list the components. Instead, try to get backers to envision themselves at the table about to play the game.

Basic Information

Player count. Play time. Age limit. Put the basic facts about the game, but AVOID GIANT WALLS OF TEXT. Very few people are going to read that three-paragraph synopsis you came up with that explains everything about your game's mechanisms and theme. Show don't tell. Use pictures, graphics, and videos, and keep the text to a couple sentences or less.

Header Images

Use professional-looking graphics to separate the different sections of your campaign page. This is an easy way to make your project seem more professional and inject theme into your page.

Don't just type out How to Play before that section, create an image that says that in a really cool font that matches your game's theme, and if your game is set in the wild west, put some bullet holes and a wanted poster in there to really get backers in the western mood.

How to Play

Once you draw backers in with the artwork, table presence, and theme, you then have to prove to them that the game is actually fun to play. And you do this using GIFs and a how-to-play video. And again, if you're not good at making this type of content, hire a professional.

GIFs are great because they can quickly give backers the gist of how the game works through animations. Take the key actions or phases of your game, and turn them into short GIFs of that action or phase happening in the game. But try not to have more than five.

There are lots of GIF maker websites where you can create these graphics. However, I've found PowerPoint to be a really great program to use. There's a bit of a learning curve, but there are some great tutorials on YouTube.

And it's also a good idea to have a brief how-to-play video that explains how the game works in more depth but is also still concise. Be clear, make sure the lighting and sound are good, and if you aren't good at explaining games or speaking with enthusiasm, find someone who is.

Print-n-Play Link

The print-n-play community is small but growing rapidly, so it's nice to have a link to the prototype print-n-play file for your game. It doesn't have to be the full game, and many of the people who

download it won't actually go through the trouble of printing it out and making it. However, some will, and many others will download the file just to see what the game's cards and whatnot look like up close.

For more information about creating a great print-n-play file, check out this podcast: boardgamedesignlab.com/martin

Rulebook Link

Many backers want to read the actual rules for the game in order to get a feel for how it plays, so you definitely need to have a big, obvious graphic that links to the rulebook file. The rules don't have to be their final form with finished graphic design (although you get bonus points if they are), but you should have something they can at least skim through.

I like to link to a Google doc that allows backers to post comments. They can ask questions about rules they don't understand and make suggestions. I've found this to be a great way to improve a ruleset for the people who are actually going to be playing the game.

Tabletop Simulator Link

This isn't a must-have, but it's a great little "extra" that creates another way for potential backers to check out your game and even play it if they want. If you're not familiar with Tabletop Simulator (TTS for short), it's a program that allows you to create a digital version of your game that people can access over the internet.

There's a bit of a learning curve, but you can find some instructional videos here: boardgamedesignlab.com/TTS

There are also lots of people in the Board Game Design Lab Facebook group who have extensive knowledge of the platform and would be glad to help you figure it out.

Beautiful Images

Again, a campaign page relies heavily on visuals, so it's a great idea

to have some nice, professional-looking pictures of your game posted throughout your page. You'll notice the pictures on Roxley's pages are very stylized and look incredible. They make the game and components jump off the page and do a great job of making you want to play the game.

Review and Preview Videos

Hopefully, you read the previous chapter and are up to speed on why these videos are important. On your campaign page, there needs to be a clearly labeled section where all your review/preview videos can be found

Why Back Now?

One of the biggest barriers you'll have to overcome with potential backers is convincing them to back the game while it's on Kickstarter as opposed to just waiting to buy it at retail. So, create a graphic with a list of reasons why backers should jump on board now.

Possible reasons could be: discounted price, exclusive content, free/discounted shipping, early delivery, free content, etc.

Quotes

Testimonials from people backers trust can go a long way in getting them to trust you and buy your game. So, it's smart to strategically place quotes either throughout your campaign page or in a testimonial section.

You can use quotes from your review/preview videos, playtester feedback, influencers who have played the game, etc. Just make sure they stand out on the page.

Stretch Goals

You can find more information about stretch goals in chapter fourteen, but if you're going to have stretch goals, create good looking graphics for them in their own section of your page.

When the campaign begins, it's better to have this section toward the bottom of the page, but if the campaign really takes off, you may want to move it higher up as backers will want to see all the cool stuff that's been unlocked without having to scroll down too far.

When you launch your campaign, post between zero and three stretch goals.

If you post a bunch of goals and blow through them all on the first day, this might cause you to scramble to add more which may lead to some poor decisions. If you post a bunch of goals and struggle to fund, you'll be stuck with the goals you already posted, and it'll be difficult to adjust.

So, it's better to start with just a few (or none), see how the first couple of days go, and then post more accordingly.

Pledge Levels and Components

The sidebar of your campaign page will have all of your pledge levels and prices listed, but there's very little space available. So, toward the bottom of your page, put a section that clearly shows what backers get at each pledge level, and use great-looking images to really drive home what backers are getting for their money.

This is a great place to have a component list with pictures to solidify your value proposition. And remember to show more than you tell. Images and graphics are much better than text.

Shipping Rates

One of the main questions on backers' minds is how much shipping is going to cost, especially if they live internationally. So, near the bottom of your page, make sure to have a graphic that explains very clearly what the shipping rates are if you're charging shipping through Kickstarter or what they are projected to be if you're charging shipping through a pledge manager.

Make it clear which countries you're shipping to and which ones you're not. And make it clear if your shipping is "friendly" for cer-

tain regions, meaning that backers won't have to pay duties, fees, or taxes to their government when they receive the game.

Also, if you're providing a shipping subsidy for backers, make sure to tell them even if the discount is already built into the price.

Projected Timeline

Many backers appreciate having a graphic that shows your projected timelines for the various phases of your project. Start it with "Kickstarter Ends," end it with "Shipped to Backers," and put all the other phases in between: manufacturing, pledge manager open/close dates, ocean freight, fulfillment, etc. You don't have to be overly specific; having just the month and year are fine.

Build in lots of buffer time just in case the project hits snags that push it back, and make sure to put something along the lines of "All dates are subject to change" below the graphic.

Social Media Links

Create some nice images to act as links to all your social media pages. Bonus points if the images also align with the game's theme.

About the Team

Backers feel connected to people much more than some faceless company, so use this section to share pictures and bios for all the people contributing to the game. Keep it brief, and have fun with it.

Risks and Challenges

This is where you're supposed to put all the potential obstacles that could pop up that would make it difficult to deliver your game to backers. Kickstarter requires you to put something here, but don't worry about being overly detailed. Writing about every possible challenge is a waste of time, so instead, just make sure you're hitting the highlights of potential setbacks to let backers know you're aware, but then move on to spending more time working on other aspects of your campaign page.

Chapter 13:

Campaign Updates

Because of the nature of Kickstarter, updates are a vital part of the process. You aren't just selling a product, you're also building a community. And communities need to be communicated with. They backed your game because they wanted to be part of bringing it to life. They're excited about it, and updates are the best way to keep the excitement going.

Also, many backers have had at least one negative experience on Kickstarter in which a project either never delivered or was ridiculously late. So, these backers are usually a bit leary and want regular updates, especially from new creators.

If done well, updates can boost your marketing, build hype, create trust, and provide you with awesome ways to improve your game.

During the Campaign

While your campaign is live, updates are the best way to communicate with backers. You can thank them for being part of the project. You can post videos and pictures to show off various aspects of the game. You can reveal stretch goals. You can use narrative to reveal backstories for the game's characters and world. You can ask questions, post surveys, and get feedback on anything related to the project.

You can do all sorts of things to keep the excitement going and develop a relationship with your backer community.

How Often

While the campaign is live, you want to post often enough to keep backers engaged but not so often that they opt out of being notified about new updates. There is no specific number, and it'll change depending on the campaign's size and your bandwidth as a creator.

Some creators, like Skybound Games, post an update nearly every day of a campaign and provide really great narrative elements for backers to read and enjoy. If you have a game with lots of characters, a unique world, or a story that lends itself to narrative updates, this can be an awesome way to draw people into your game's world.

Just keep in mind the monumental effort it takes to write this kind of content. If you choose this path, have a lot of it planned out in advance, and if you're not a writer...hire a writer. This kind of content only works if it's actually enjoyable to read.

At the bare minimum, post an update two to three times a week. You can keep them simple while still sharing news about how the project is doing. Talk about upcoming milestones, seek feedback, and remember to use visuals like pictures and video to increase engagement. Walls of text tend to get ignored.

And if your project takes off, be careful not to get too enthusiastic and post too many updates. If you blow through ten stretch goals in a day, don't post an update for each one. In this situation, it's better to post one big update instead of a bunch of small ones.

Plan Ahead

When I asked successful creators about updates, one of the main ideas that came up over and over again was to have at least some of them planned and written in advance. You obviously don't want it to seem like a generic form letter, but going into the campaign, you should have a pretty good idea about what some of the updates will be about.

When a campaign is live, there are a million little details to take care of, so planning ahead will save you a tremendous amount of time and stress. And your updates will be a lot better if you write them when you're not stressed out and sleep-deprived.

So, updates about reaching the funding goal, really cool stretch goals you want to highlight, planned questions you want to ask

backers, etc. can all be written before you launch and then adjusted as necessary when it comes time to post them.

Ask Questions

If you read many blogs or follow many YouTube channels, one of the main things you probably notice is that content creators tend to end their posts and videos with a question. Human psychology tells us that people are much more likely to respond if you actually call them to action, so asking a specific question leads to a lot more comments and overall engagement.

The same is true for Kickstarter updates. To increase engagement and make backers feel like they're part of the campaign (and not just throwing money at it), ask questions at the end of your updates. It could be silly or serious, relevant or not. The biggest thing is to give people a chance to be heard.

But one of the best ways to engage your backer community is to ask questions that directly affect the game. You can ask about color and art choices, component upgrades, stretch goals, etc. And then you can post polls and surveys to let backers vote on narrowed down options. Kickstarter provides creators with the unique opportunity to talk to their target audience, get feedback, and improve a product before it ever hits the market.

Don't waste that opportunity.

Layout

Jamey Stegmaier had some really good advice on how to organize an update to maximize the chances that it gets read.

1. At the top, summarize the most important points.
2. Post a picture or graphic that's relevant to the update.
3. Post all the specific details.
4. End the update with a question or call to action.

After the Campaign

After the clock hits zero and the confetti falls, the real work begins, and you'll move on to the not so glamorous world of manufacturing, shipping, and fulfillment. This is a time when a lot of creators disappear and forget to post updates which leads to restless (sometimes disgruntled) backers.

However, you have a great opportunity to continue building community and trust during this time, so make sure to post regular updates about the status of the project.

“Backers Only”

When creating an update, you'll be able to mark it as “public” so that anyone who comes to the Kickstarter page can see it or as “backers only” so that only people who have backed the project can see it. This allows you to separate exclusive content or backer specific updates from general posts. However, if your project is open to late backers through a pledge manager, please keep in mind that the late backers won't be able to see the updates. So, in general, it's better to make your updates public unless you have a really good reason not to.

How Often

As soon as the campaign ends, post an update letting backers know how often you're going to post updates going forward. It should be a least once a month, and letting them know will set their expectations and create accountability for you.

A lot of times, creators won't post an update for a while because “there's nothing new to report.” While artwork is being completed, the games are crossing the ocean, etc., there can be months of time that you're just waiting for things to happen.

However, be aware that there is no update too small. Even if all you post is “Things are still moving along,” it goes a long way with backers and lets them know you're still there, and you're still working on the project.

You can use these waiting periods to post playthroughs and other content that show off the game and hopefully keep people excited to receive their copy. You can also post updates that are more “behind the scenes” and talk about your design process or personal life. The main thing is to continue to post updates at the rate you told backers you would.

In James Hudson’s interview, he said one of the biggest mistakes he’s made as a creator was going too long between updates for the game *Tidal Blades*. There were some production obstacles that created long periods of time in which the game was stuck and not getting any closer to backers’ tables.

James was regularly answering questions and talking to people in the campaign’s comments section, but he wasn’t posting regular updates. This led to quite a few frustrated backers and brought the campaign’s morale down as a whole.

He was trying to keep the updates reserved for “important” milestones, but now it looks like there was a three-month lapse in communication. Moving forward, he’s putting everything into the updates.

James said, “As creators, the little things can seem inconsequential to us, but I think it’s important to remember that backers aren’t in the trenches with us. So even those little things can be engaging to someone outside of the process.”

Progress Graphic

One of the best ways I’ve seen a creator keep backers updated on the status of a project is the progress graphic Carla Kopp uses for all of her company’s games. It looks like this:

This type of graphic is great because it communicates the current state of a project clearly and quickly. And Carla uses this graphic not only in updates but also as the project’s main image so that backers can check the progress right on the campaign page.

And she uses different colored boxes to note where that particular part of the project is. Green for done, yellow for in progress, and



grey for still left to do. It's simple, easy to understand, and means there's no confusion about how far along the game is.

I've seen other creators use more detailed charts and graphs to convey this information which also works. The main takeaway is to create some type of image that lets backers know where they stand with receiving the game.

Be Transparent

It's almost guaranteed that your game is going to run into obstacles. There will be delays. Unforeseen challenges will pop up when you least expect them to. Certain phases will take way longer than they were supposed to. And to be honest, you're probably going to make a few mistakes.

However, it's rarely about what happens. It's almost always about how you handle it.

A lot of creators will try to hide their mistakes or pretend like everything is fine and will refrain from posting updates because they don't have any good news to share. But this is a recipe for disaster and will absolutely destroy trust with your backer community when they eventually find out what's going on.

When bad things happen or when the project gets delayed, the best

thing you can do is immediately tell your backers. Explain the situation, tell them the details, and let them know you're working to resolve the issues. (They might even have some advice on how to fix the problem.)

Backers are pretty forgiving when you're upfront with them, and many of them have backed quite a few projects, so they understand obstacles and delays are normal. Just be open and honest.

Transparency creates trust, and trust creates community. Never forget that.

Chapter 14: **The Stretch Goal**

If you've been around board game Kickstarter projects for very long, you've witnessed the interesting phenomena of stretch goals. These "bonuses" can be a great way to add value and awesome content to your game as more backers come in, but they can also be huge pit traps that completely tank your company.

Some creators use them; some don't. But whatever you decide to do, make sure you do your research on as many other campaigns as possible so you understand what you're getting into or what you're opting out of.

What Are Stretch Goals?

In theory, a stretch goal is additional content that you are able to include in a game as a result of decreased costs due to more backers leading to rising "economy of scales." Before we continue, let's clarify what "economies of scale" means with a relevant example:

Let's say your manufacturer gives you options to produce 500 copies for \$5,000 (\$10 each), or 1,000 copies for \$9,000 (\$9 each). While producing 500 copies costs less overall than producing 1,000 copies of the game, you will be purchasing the game at an overall lower cost by ordering a larger print run. If you earn enough to pay for the larger print run of 1,000 copies, you theoretically have an extra \$1,000 in savings by upgrading to a larger run.

Backers expect you to invest that cost savings into awesome things that upgrade the game! These might be things like thicker cardstock, more components, upgrading cardboard to wooden tokens, and more.

In short: Print more games, get each game cheaper, add more cool stuff to the box.

However, they are really just a Kickstarter marketing technique.

You're simply gamifying the funding process for your backers so that they are excited about what comes next. Veteran Kickstarter backers have come to expect them and are actually pretty educated in this area due to the longstanding trend of companies including them in their Kickstarter board game campaigns.

In order to plan out your stretch goals properly, you need to pre-plan them into the cost of your game. Thus, many would call them a gimmick. After all, scaling from 500 backers to 550 backers isn't *really* enough to result in decreased manufacturing costs.

But at their core, they're a way to keep the momentum of your project going and improve your game in the process.

What Are Some Common Examples?

Here are the stretch goals I see most often:

- Linen finish cards
- More minis!
- Extra characters
- Upgraded first-player marker
- Upgraded dice quality
- Upgraded box quality
- Upgraded box insert
- Upgrading cardboard tokens to wooden ones

A Case for Them

Stretch goals generate excitement. They give backers a reason to jump on a campaign early and to share it with their friends. They get people to look at your campaign regularly to see what's been added. They increase backer engagement and make for a lively comments section. They incentivize acting now instead of waiting for the game to show up in retail.

One less-discussed aspect of stretch goals that I also find valuable is that they provide a meaningful context for backers to engage with a creator to shape the creation of the game. Adjusting your strategy to what backers want often causes them to care much more about your project because they feel a sense of ownership in it.

And, at the same time, a creator gets to give something back to those who support the game. Many creators want to show their appreciation for backers, and stretch goals are a great way to do that.

Engagement in your campaign will cause more people to talk about it, and this leads to more potential backers to discover it (both through browsing Kickstarter and through other social channels).

A Case Against Them

Stretch goals, for the most part, are a game in and of themselves. They are based on the additional funding your campaign brings in, but the truth is that increasing your backer count by 50-100 backers to knock down that next goal is typically not enough to activate economies of scale.

This is an oversimplified example, but if your goal was 300 backers, you aren't theoretically going to scale until you venture past 500 backers based on the above example. As a result, many stretch goals are actually things that a company would include at a slight loss to their profit margin. Therefore, most stretch goals you see are inexpensive things like more cards or a spot UV finish to make the box cover shiny.

When a stretch goal adds a significant amount to the cost of a game or additional shipping weight, this creates a logistical problem that can venture far beyond the cost savings of economies of scale. In fact, Jamey Stegmaier, of Stonemaier Games, is famously quoted as saying that if he had managed to unlock the “metal coins” stretch goal in his *Viticulture* Kickstarter campaign, he likely would have gone out of business due to the uncalculated added cost!

All this said, potentially making a huge mistake, like underesti-

mating shipping costs, is not the only reason to consider avoiding stretch goals. They can also dilute a good game with under-developed content. As a creator, it is possible to give fans exactly what they want to the harm of your product.

Consider the first time a fan opens the box and plays the game. This experience needs to make them want to play again, or they might put your game on the shelf and never open (or talk about it) again. When you add new content that is not properly playtested, you dilute the awesomeness of your product.

Stretch Goal Alternatives

Campaigns without stretch goals emphasize that they are putting out the exact product they want. These have chosen to leave out the “stretch goal game” from their Kickstarter projects, electing to include every component upgraded for a true break-even funding goal. But to still keep up the excitement and momentum of the campaign, these creators introduce other ways for backers to engage with the project.

If you take a look at **Frosthaven** by Isaac Childres, you can see this process in action. They had a ton of buzz going into the campaign already, and they had a ton of fans excited and evangelizing about their game before it even launched. So, they elected to forego the stretch goal game and just give people an offer with “everything included.”

Instead of stretch goals, they pre-planned one puzzle every day to keep their current fans engaged and talking. This was something that excited fans could come back and test their creative skills day after day, and made for some great consumable content for their dedicated player base. With over 83,000 backers pledging nearly \$13 million USD, they did it beautifully well.

(However, most games aren't going to come with a large swathe of buzz and fans like this. New creators, especially, have to claw their way up from the bottom, one backer at a time. Isaac's first cam-

campaign earned \$105,965 USD with ~1800 backers (still a huge success), and that campaign had stretch goals.)

Some may deem stretch goals a ruse and pointless, but I don't see it that way. They are a legitimate way to keep fans engaged, and interesting goals do attract new fans. Like it or not, they increase momentum, so they need to be a tool in your arsenal. They are something that potential backers look for, and the right goals will get more followers and backers to your campaign.

Planning Your Stretch Goals

The best way to avoid a catastrophic mistake with your stretch goals is by planning them out long before you launch your campaign. Whenever you're reaching out to potential manufacturers for quotes, make sure you include anything that could possibly be stretch goal content in the quote request.

Then, devise a plan with a stretch goal schedule for when certain things unlock. After that, create two more plans just in case the campaign doesn't go as expected: one plan for if the campaign catches fire and really over funds and another plan for if the campaign stagnates and underperforms.

Now, once your campaign is successful, you're bound to have backers suggest some really cool ways to upgrade your game, and they'll likely have ideas for some awesome stuff you hadn't even thought of. But creator beware. Deviating from the stretch goal plan can spell disaster. So, don't let the excitement get the better of you. It's definitely fine to add unplanned stretch goals to a campaign, but make sure you talk things over with your manufacturer first to get some hard data on how much it's going to affect your game's cost.

Flash Funding Goals

This is where you promise that every backer in your main pledge tiers gets an extra add-on, an upgrade, or an otherwise early stretch goal of some kind.

Most often, this is something that meaningfully contributes to gameplay or upgrades a component's quality. Some examples of this are unlocking a new character for the base game, upgrading the first player token to metal, or upgrading the card stock to linen or thicker stock.

This is a legitimate stretch goal that serves the purpose of making your game a more attractive thing for everyone if it's unlocked early. Prospective backers that see the momentum will jump on the bandwagon.

But this is a double-edged sword. If you succeed, everyone loves it, and you stand to gain a lot more momentum as a result. If you fail, it looks pretty bad on your campaign.

The bright side of this unfortunate situation is that you can just shuffle that goal back into the line of stretch goals. And if you get close, you can show graciousness to your backers by unlocking it anyway!

Flash vs Fire

At this point, many backers can see through the smoke and mirrors of a lot of stretch goals, and it'll be obvious to them which goals actually add to the game and which ones are just fluff. That's not to say you shouldn't have "fluffy" goals built in like a box sleeve, spot UV box art, and other surface-level "upgrades." But make sure you're mixing them in with provocative content that actually makes the game better.

Upgrading the cards to linen finish. Adding new character options. Upgrading plastic coins to metal ones. Going from grey miniatures to painted ones. These are the kinds of items that really move the needle on a project.

But for goodness sake, as was mentioned earlier, make sure you're not crippling your campaign by stretching yourself too thin. It's best to limit how much fire you add to your game so that it doesn't burn down the entire project.

Solo Modes

Quite a few campaigns have had “adding a solo mode” as a stretch goal, but I want to caution you away from that. The solo gaming community is getting bigger and bigger, so it’s actually better for your campaign to include a solo mode from the beginning if you plan to do one at all.

Many solo gamers have been burned by solo modes that were really just tacked-on afterthoughts, and having a solo mode stretch goal suggests it wasn’t part of the original plan.

Exclusive Content

As you read in chapter nine, exclusive content carries quite a few pros and cons. And the same concepts that apply to having exclusive reward levels also apply to having exclusive stretch goal content.

While Kickstarter exclusive cards, minis, characters, etc. can boost your campaign, they can also be frustrating to people who find your game after the Kickstarter closes. In my experience, people don’t mind Kickstarter exclusive stretch goals that provide backers with non-gameplay related items like variant artwork, but if it has anything to do with gameplay, it’s better to offer it as a limited exclusive.

In other words, backers get it for free, but future customers can acquire it at conventions or from your website while supplies last.

Social Goals

Social goals are a specialized form of stretch goals that are specifically designed to encourage backer participation and increase the organic sharing of a project. A clever creator will use social stretch goals to win the right to communicate with their fans and backers through as many mediums as possible.

Examples of this in action:

We unlock a “Social Stretch Goal” when:

- ...the game reaches 500 subscribers on BoardGameGeek.com
- ...the company twitter account gets to 1500 total followers
- ...a specific Facebook post gets to 100 shares
- ...the game’s Facebook group hits 1800 members
- ...the project hits rank 1 on Kicktraq.com
- ...the company email list reaches 900 subscribers
- etc.

The above are examples that have been used many times by Kick-starter creators, but the chosen objectives, numbers, and total quantity of social goals vary by project. After all, your company will often focus on different mediums of communication than the examples above.

A word of caution to the wise: Social stretch goals that seem too far out or are too numerous may actually discourage backers from participating. If you want to do this right, you need to focus your effort on one to three meaningful goals at a time. After all, if they prove popular, you can always reveal more or offer additional rewards for much higher subscriber/follower counts!

Should you use social stretch goals?

Stretch goals get people excited, and social goals are meant to pile on to the excitement. Some companies have combined the two while others have opted to only use one or the other.

What you cannot afford to do is fail to engage your backers. A thirty-day campaign with less than one comment per day is an affair that is quickly forgotten. Remaining top of mind will get you into the board game news cycle, will increase your rank on the Kick-starter “discovery” algorithm (for more backers), and will raise a whole lot more money for your campaign!

A social stretch goal is not the only viable way to encourage backer participation and sharing. If you have an excited fanbase, you might want to encourage them to return and check your campaign page or read your updates in a different way. There are many alternatives out there, limited only by your creativity.

Examples of some “social stretch goal” alternatives:

- Pit two in-game factions against each other, asking your fans to vote, post on your forum, or play mini-games to earn points.
- Set up game puzzles for your fans to solve
- Pre-plan and share “secret item/component unlocks” that automatically unlock each day
- Share a special campaign-focused narrative each day
- Ask backers to choose one goal or another

A few campaigns that did a great job with “social stretch goal alternatives” are *Trial By Trolley* by Skybound Games and *Frosthaven* by Cephalofair Games. These campaigns were extremely popular and exciting due to their methodology of engaging their backers. Their respective companies are innovating in this area and worth following for great ideas.

What rewards should you offer for social goals?

While social goals can be indirectly tied to earning new backers for your campaign, they do not generate money for your campaign on their own. Thus, rewards for social goals should generally be inexpensive and easy to add without much extra cost.

Cardstock is very inexpensive, so if your game includes cards for things like items or characters, this is a great use of social goals. Many times, creators actually pull out components they are intending to include in the game anyway in order to offer a “freebie” to backers. Backers only know what you tell them, and they appreciate getting stuff! If you give them extra cards or an additional character, even if you intended to include it anyway, they will appreciate and find value in that gesture!

Chapter 15:

What to Put on the Box

The first thing people usually see is the box for your game. And though it would be nice to live in a world where people didn't judge a game by its box, that's not the world we live in. Even for your Kickstarter campaign, the box will be one of the main things that either hooks backers in or causes them to keep scrolling. And then, of course, if the game is on a retail shelf, the box will be instrumental in enticing a person to buy it.

But it's not only about the visuals and art. There's a lot of information that needs to be present on the box to make it a sellable product.

Art

One of the best ways to start getting the word out about your game, jumpstart your email list, and hook potential backers in is by posting your box art online. The box art should convey the theme, target audience, and quality of the game all in one image (which is no small task).

The box art is typically the first thing people will see, so it needs to hook them in and make them want to learn more. It's like the thumbnail image for a YouTube video. It has one job: to draw people in. So, make sure it's done well.

Layout

A lot of information needs to be on the box, especially the back, and it can get really busy and overwhelming. So, make sure you lay out all of that information so that it's visually appealing. Here's a place where hiring an awesome graphic designer pays huge dividends.

If the back of your box is a mess and confusing, people will assume the game is too. This won't affect a Kickstarter campaign

too much as backers rarely see the back of a box on a project page, but this is definitely something to keep in mind once the game lands on shelves.

Names

It's not a requirement, and some companies don't do it, but I'm of the opinion that the names of the game's designer, artist/illustrator, and graphic designer should be clearly visible on the box, preferably the front.

A lot of people buy games based on who designed them, so you'll want to put the designer's name in a prominent position. And since the artist and graphic designer have instrumental roles in the overall success of a game, I believe their names should be listed prominently as well.

The Hook

Whatever the main hook for your game is, make sure it's on the box. It could be a tagline that goes under the title on the front of the box. It could be a few sentences that tell a potential player about the game's world and how it plays. Or it could be a paragraph that paints the picture of the experience players will have. Just make sure it's intriguing and makes people want to open the box to see what's inside.

Setup

It's a good idea to have an image on the back of the box that shows what the game looks like set up on a table. Many companies use a digital image of the game in progress to draw people in. And a lot of gamers have enough experience with games to be able to get a good understanding of your game from the setup image alone.

The setup image you use on your campaign page can be repurposed and placed on the back of the box.

Basic Details

Player count. Age limit. Play time. The information for these three items needs to be clearly visible on the box. Whether you put it on the front, side, or back, it doesn't matter. Just make sure it's obvious. And be aware that the age limit is a legal requirement. (8+, 14+, etc.)

CE Marking

If your game can be played by children and you want to sell it in the European Union, your box will need the CE mark on it to show the game abides by the safety guidelines established for toys.

Be aware that it's your responsibility to ensure the game undergoes the proper safety testing, but your manufacturer should be either be able to do it or able to connect you with a third-party testing company.

Most games only require three types of testing: 1. Mechanical and physical properties 2. Flammability 3. Specification for migration of certain elements. The testing company might try to get you to pay for a whole host of other tests, but they're a waste of money.

If your game is for ages 14+, it does not need the testing or the CE mark. However, if your game can obviously be played by children, and you put 14+ on it just to avoid the added cost of testing, you run the risk of having your game flagged and held in customs.

Also, keep track of the testing paperwork as you'll be required to send it to customs if they flag your game.

You can find the CE mark icon through a Google search.

Contact Information

For marketing purposes, it's good to have the URL for your website and your social media tags on the back of the box so that customers can check out your company and see other games you've made.

Also, many countries require you to put your company's address on the box, so make sure that's on there somewhere, and if you

plan on selling the game in the European Union after fulfilling it to Kickstarter backers, you'll need to put the address for the company representing you in Europe.

Choking Hazard

You must put either the icon showing that the game is not suitable for children three years and younger, or you can put, "WARNING: Choking Hazard - Small parts. Not suitable for children under 3 years." Many companies put both.

You can find the icon through a Google search.

Where the Game Is Manufactured

Where the game was manufactured must be clearly labeled. I have several friends who had their games stopped by customs because they forgot to put "MADE IN CHINA" on the back of the box.

Logos

You'll want your company logo on the box in a few places for branding purposes. And your manufacturer may offer you a small discount to put their logo on the back of the box, so make sure to ask them about it.

Bar Code

To make it easier for distributors and retailers to sell your game and for fulfillment companies to track your game through their shipping process, your box will need an unobscured bar code on a white background with plenty of white space around it so that the scanner is sure to pick it up.

You only need one bar code per product. (If you print 2,000 copies of your game, all of them will have the same bar code.)

For a game, you'll need a UPC (universal product code) bar code which can be purchased from the aptly named buyabarcodes.com, and they offer discounts if you buy in bulk.

ISBN

If your Kickstarter campaign is for a book, you'll need an ISBN (international standard book number) instead of a UPC. You would also need an ISBN if your game will be sold in book stores like Barnes and Noble, but this is rare.

SKU

Hopefully, you already got your SMC (standard manufacturing code) as was outlined in chapter four, and hopefully you've created unique SKU (stock-keeping unit) codes for the products you're selling on Kickstarter.

You don't have to put the SKU on your game box, but it's not a bad idea to have it near the bar code. And be sure to create a spreadsheet that keeps track of all the codes you've created. You don't want to accidentally use the same code twice.

Now, SKUs won't be particularly important during your Kickstarter campaign, but distributors and retailers order games based on SKUs, so if you want your game to have any kind of retail presence, it'll need a SKU code. Also, many fulfillment companies use SKU codes to keep track of your products to make sure they're shipping the correct items to your backers.

NOT the Price

Do not put the MSRP (manufacturer's suggested retail price) on the box. If a retailer backs your game to get copies for their store, and then they want to sell it for a different price, it's a lot easier if a price isn't already printed on the box.

However, please note that some retailers, like Barnes and Noble, require the price to be on the box, but this is rare.

Contents

The back of your box must contain a summary of everything that comes inside. (108 cards, 1 rulebook, 10 dice, etc.) You can be vague or specific, but the list of components needs to be there.

Also, if any necessary components don't come in the box, you'll need to list that as well. "Batteries not included" for example, and this must be visible on the front of the box.

Assembly Required

If your game requires any kind of assembly, "Some Assembly Required" must be on the box.

Best Practices

To get a better understanding for all of this, look at some boxes for games made by well-known and established companies. You'll likely get some good ideas on how to create a box that has all the legally required content and looks great at the same time.

Chapter 16: **When to Cancel and Relaunch (or not)**

Now, hopefully, you have a great game that fits the Kickstarter market, and you've done an awesome job of building up an audience before launch. Hopefully, you fund on the first day and get to sit back and enjoy riding the wave of backers and money rolling in.

But things don't always go to plan. There are plenty of large, established companies that have made millions of dollars on Kickstarter that have had to cancel and relaunch a campaign for one reason or another. And the platform is littered with plenty of new creators who didn't quite reach their funding goal and plenty of people who barely got double-digit backers.

Just remember, if this happens to you, don't panic. It's not some big, red mark on your permanent record or anything. As long as you handle it smoothly, future backers aren't going to count it against you. (Just don't let it become a trend.)

Figure out what went wrong, address the problems, relaunch. It's just that simple...and just that hard. And be open to the fact that maybe your game simply isn't a good product. It could be that failing to fund was a huge blessing and saves you a great deal of time and expense and allows you to pivot toward a game that will fit the market much better.

Whatever the case may be, this chapter will help you navigate the frustrating and difficult situation of running an unsuccessful campaign.

When to Pull the Plug

Years ago, it was normal for a game's funding to be slow out of the gate but then pick up momentum and fund in the middle or toward the end of the campaign.

Those days are over.

If your game doesn't fund in the first three days, you've obviously made some serious mistakes, and you should start to think about canceling. As mentioned several times in this book, you should have built up an audience for your game long before launching your campaign, so if people aren't showing up to back your project in the first 72 hours, something is definitely wrong.

Now, this doesn't mean you're guaranteed to fail, and it's possible that with a ton of on-the-fly changes and increased marketing efforts your game could find a way to limp across the finish line. But it's more likely that you need to humbly pull the plug on the campaign, regroup, make some changes, and come back stronger next time.

This is especially true if you were banking on adding a ton of stretch goal content to the game.

After you decide to cancel, it's a good idea to let your backers know the situation and then wait and cancel the campaign just before the deadline. This will keep the project active on Kickstarter and hopefully bring in more people who then show up for the relaunch.

The Main Reasons Campaigns Fail

Typically, a campaign fails due to either a lack of trust or a bad value proposition (or both).

Some campaigns fail because there aren't any third-party preview videos on the project page, so backers don't trust the game is any good.

Some fail because the page doesn't look good or is confusing or doesn't have professional graphics, so backers don't trust the creator to get things done.

Some fail because backers have no idea who the creator is.

Some fail because the game is overpriced.

Some fail because the shipping is overpriced.

Some fail because the game is derivative and looks just like a bunch of other games already on the market.

Some fail because backers see no reason to back now when they can just get it in retail later.

There are lots of specific reasons why a campaign doesn't do well, but they all boil down to two things. Either the project isn't able to build up enough trust with backers to get them to actually pull out their credit cards or when backers see the game and compare it to the cost, there's a disconnect.

If your campaign is struggling, look at those two things.

Funded but Canceling?

There's been a trend in recent times when a campaign will hit its funding goal but then the creator will still cancel it. This typically happens when the funding goal was set too low, and so funding doesn't actually provide enough money to make the game.

It also happens when a creator had a ton of stretch goal content planned, and barely funding means that most of it won't end up getting added to the game.

To put it bluntly, it's not a good look, however, as long as you communicate clearly and honestly with your backers, most people completely understand. Backers want to receive the best possible version of your game, so if that means canceling and relaunching, a lot of people get it.

But not everyone. You're going to have a serious customer service issue on your hands with some backers, so be ready to politely respond to messages and comments from frustrated people who are unhappy with you.

If you've funded, but you're contemplating canceling, really think through the pros and cons of that decision, and make sure it'll be worth it in the long run.

How to Regroup

When I was playing college football, we had a big sign in our film room that said "You are what you put on tape." No matter how good you thought you had played, the tape never lied. Every mistake was there for the whole room to see, and you could either pretend every-

thing was great or you could take that information and get better.

Kickstarter is no different. If your campaign fails, DO NOT blame anyone or anything but yourself. You made key errors that led to the situation, and you need to identify and own those errors if you want to have a chance at succeeding when you relaunch.

Keep in mind that the most funded game in history, Frosthaven, ran its campaign during a global pandemic when unemployment rates were through the roof. If your campaign fails, you have no excuse.

Post an update and ask the backers you did have why they think the campaign didn't do better. A lot of them have probably backed quite a few games, and they'll have some good insight on what you can improve.

Go into some of the board game and Kickstarter related Facebook groups, and ask people their thoughts on your campaign.

If you want to go to the next level, hire someone who has run successful campaigns to act as a consultant to help you figure out your project's problems and come up with solutions.

The main thing is to be humble and listen to the criticism. Don't get upset or offended. Take it in, learn from it, and make changes accordingly.

How to Tell Backers

It's pretty simple: just be open, honest, and transparent. Don't speak as a company; speak as an individual creator. Talk about the mistakes that were made and about your ideas for ways to fix them.

Ask for feedback, and invite them into the next stage of the journey as you regroup and make changes. Don't overthink it. Don't overdo it.

Failure happens to everyone. Just own it and thank backers for being there. Then, get to work, and post updates regularly about what you're doing in preparation for the relaunch.

When to Relaunch

This is going to sound a bit trite, but honestly, you should relaunch whenever you're ready.

If your main problem was that you didn't have any preview videos on your campaign page, then hire some previewers and relaunch when those videos are done.

If your issue was that your game was overpriced, do a bunch of market research, and relaunch when you've figured out the best price point.

If you launched without building up enough of an audience, spend a bunch of time adding more people to your email list.

Whatever your problems were, however long it takes to fix them is how long you should wait before relaunching. Don't rush it. Make sure you do things right the second time around.

When to Move On

The truth is that not every game needs to become a full-fledged product. There are plenty of ideas that are fun and interesting and enjoyable to play with your friends but don't actually have a place in the gaming market.

And that's okay.

If your campaign fails, and the feedback is that the game just doesn't seem very good or people don't think it needs to become a product, then it may be time to pivot your time and resources and work on a different project.

Failure could be a blessing in disguise. It's much better to find out the market doesn't want your game *before* you print 2,000 copies of it. There are a lot of games taking up a lot of space in people's garages because they barely funded, and after shipping the games to the 200 campaign backers, no one else wanted it.

Board Game Kickstarter Advice

So, if your campaign fails, it might be best to walk away from the project entirely. I realize you feel pot-committed and that walking away will mean all the money you've spent will be wasted. But doubling down on a game that people don't want will be a much larger waste of time and money.

Sometimes, you just have to know when to walk away.

Chapter 17:

The Pledge Manager

If you've backed a game on Kickstarter, it's almost guaranteed that you have experience with a pledge manager. They've become a normal part of the board game Kickstarter ecosystem, and lots of different companies have popped up to help you manage your project's backers and rewards after the campaign closes.

But if you're new to being a Kickstarter creator, how pledge managers work and why they're so prevalent might be unknown to you, so hopefully this chapter can shed some light on the topic. Just like shipping, this is an area that can cost a lot of money, so you'll want to do your homework and know as much as you can *before* you launch your campaign.

What Is a Pledge Manager?

A pledge manager is a web-based tool that connects backers and their information to a campaign creator so that the shipping and fulfillment process can go as smoothly as possible. Everyone who backs a campaign gets access to the system where they can input and update their address, change their pledge, add additional items, and pay for things.

Some gaming companies have their own dedicated systems, but typically, publishers outsource to one of the major pledge manager companies to handle everything. Backers receive login information to get into the system and then fill out an online form to tell the project creator exactly what they want and where to send the game.

Why Not Just Use Kickstarter?

Kickstarter has a built-in survey system, but honestly, it's just not very robust or user friendly. If you have a very small campaign, their system might work well for you, but if your campaign has more than a couple hundred backers or if it has more complex op-

tions for what backers can purchase, you'll likely be much better off going with a pledge manager.

Also, if you want to charge for shipping after the campaign is over (once you know what the actual shipping costs will be), or if you want to give people the ability to late pledge or alter their pledge, you'll have to use a pledge manager as Kickstarter's system doesn't allow for any of these options.

Why a Pledge Manager Is Helpful

Basically, they make your life as a creator much easier and more profitable.

They streamline the process of taking shipping information. They let people pledge \$1 to your campaign and upgrade to the full game later. They allow people to find the campaign after it's over and still get in on it. They give backers a chance to add other items to their pledge (like previous games you've done, neoprene mats, etc.). They let you charge for shipping closer to when the game is actually going to ship so you don't have to guess what the cost will be. AND you don't have to lose 5% of your shipping charges, add-on revenue, etc. to Kickstarter fees.

They also provide a safe and secure venue for your backers to pay for things, and you don't have to worry about setting up your own payment processing site. Some pledge managers even have the ability to use their system as a storefront!

Tell Your Backers

Once again, communication with your backers is of the utmost importance. Make it very clear on your campaign page how the pledge manager will work once the campaign closes, and make it especially clear if backing for \$1 will give people access to the system.

Many times people don't have the money to pay for the game while the campaign is running, but if they can back for \$1 and pay for the game later, you'll get quite a few more backers (and you won't lose 5% of their pledges to Kickstarter).

Once the campaign closes, post an update with a rough timeline for when you hope to send out login information to backers so that they can access the pledge manager. And once you send that information out and open the system, post another updated announcing it, and make it clear what backers need to do if they did not receive the login information in their email.

Closing the Pledge Manager

Whenever you're getting ready to close the pledge manager and lock in all information, make sure you give backers LOTS of time to get their information and orders squared away. You'll typically close and lock the system when the game is almost finished at the factory.

Closing it before it ships from your manufacturer will save you lots of headaches as you won't run into an issue of not sending enough games to different regions, and it'll give you a headstart on your fulfillment process as you'll know where all the games are going.

You'll still have some backers who move to a new address or who just forgot to put their information in, but you can handle those individually as people contact you.

The main thing is to post several updates leading up to the pledge manager closing date to give backers gentle nudges to add or update their addresses and complete their orders. Invariably, quite a few backers will still wait until the last minute, and some will forget altogether, but you'll have what you need from the vast majority.

Your pledge manager should also be able to send reminder emails to backers who haven't put in their information, but use this sparingly.

Charging for Shipping

As mentioned previously, one of the main advantages of using a pledge manager is being able to charge for shipping after your campaign ends instead of having to charge for it during the campaign based on guesswork for how much the actual costs will be.

Just make sure you communicate VERY clearly that this is what you're doing, and definitely include a graphic on your campaign page that shows a range or estimate of what you expect the shipping costs to be.

You'll be able to charge different rates inside the pledge manager based on each backer's shipping address, and you can typically set up rules for how the system charges for different things. For example, if a backer adds another game to their order, you can tell the system to charge a smaller shipping amount (or none at all) for the second game.

Charging for Add-Ons

Instead of having to create a ton of pledge levels that clutter up your campaign page and confuse backers, you can use the pledge manager to make it really easy for people to add more products to their order.

And instead of backers having to do math and add money to their pledges during the campaign for items that aren't part of a pledge level, they can simply wait and do everything in the pledge manager. This saves them time and frustration, and it helps you make more money.

Also, if you have other games or products from previous campaigns, you can easily sell them in the pledge manager alongside your current game. Someone who just discovered your company might end up buying all of your other titles and become a raving fan in the process.

Late Backers

Many creators allow people who missed the Kickstarter campaign to still access the pledge manager as late backers. Some campaigns limit what late backers can buy or charge a higher price, but most campaigns give late backers access to the same things as people who backed during the campaign.

To open your project to late backers, you'll receive a link from your pledge manager that will direct people to a custom signup page where they can get login credentials to get into the system.

As soon as a Kickstarter campaign closes, you're able to utilize a button at the very top of the project page where you can redirect traffic. If you post the link to your pledge manager signup page the moment your campaign ends, I can almost guarantee you that you'll have signups from people who showed up a minute too late. You can also post the link on your website and send it out in emails to hopefully draw in more people who missed out on the campaign.

What to Look for in a Pledge Manager

Every creator and every project is different, but when researching your pledge management options, here are some great things to look into:

- **Overall cost:** What are the fees, setup charges,
- **Customer service:** How do they treat their customers?
- **Ease of use:** What's the learning curve? Are there how-to guides and resources?
- **Security:** Can backers and creators trust the company with their information?
- **Storefront option:** Can you use the pledge manager to sell games after fulfillment is complete?
- **User experience:** Does the system cater to backers and give them a great experience?
- **Data exports:** Is it easy to access your backer data, and is the information in your desired format?
- **Reminders:** Does the system allow you to send out reminder emails to backers who haven't completed their orders yet?

Possible Options

Below you'll find a list of pledge managers worth looking into. I

won't get into their current rates, setup costs, specific services, etc. as those change rather often, and each one has pros and cons depending on the size and scope of your particular project.

So, you'll want to go through and research the different options, and I highly recommend talking to creators who have used different pledge managers for their own campaigns to get honest insight on what worked for them and what didn't.

Listed in alphabetical order:

- BackerKit
- Crowd Ox
- Fluent PM
- Gamefound
- Jetbacker
- Pledge Manager

Chapter 18:

Shipping and Fulfillment

To be honest, shipping and fulfillment are a bit outside the purview of this book, and they could easily fill up an entire book on their own. However, since so many Kickstarter creators make mistakes when delivering games to backers, I wanted to at least include some tips and tricks and things to be aware of in this book.

The logistics that come with shipping games all over the world can be very difficult to get your arms around, so make sure you're doing a ton of research and seeking advice from people who have done it before.

Also, I've done two super in-depth podcast episodes about shipping and fulfillment that you might find helpful:

boardgamedesignlab.com/shipping

boardgamedesignlab.com/fulfillment

Hiring Help

If this is your first campaign, I highly recommend hiring someone to help you with organizing all the shipping and fulfillment. It's obviously cheaper to do it yourself, but hiring someone will likely be a lot cheaper than making even one mistake. (If your project has 2,000 backers and you make a \$1 mistake, you just cost yourself \$2,000.)

Find someone who has done it before and pay for their services. And then take notes on everything they do. Learn the different pitfalls and ask questions. Then, down the road, if you feel confident enough to do it yourself, go for it.

However, personally, I always hire someone else to handle this aspect of my projects. Paying someone else saves me a tremendous amount of time that I can devote to other things, and it's always been money well spent. Also, many fulfillment companies offer services to handle getting your games from the factory all the way to backers' doors.

Rate Changes

Shipping costs almost always go up in January (and sometimes in July as well), so you'll need to account for the rate increase if your project is going to ship later than the year you fund. Usually, it's only a 2-4% increase, but I've seen as much as a 15% increase for different shipping categories. And that can turn into a lot of money for a campaign with lots of backers. (This is another reason to consider charging shipping in a pledge manager.)

So, make sure you anticipate the rate increase and build a buffer into your budget.

The Real Costs of Doing It Yourself

If you look at the rates a fulfillment company charges, you might at first think that you can do it yourself for a lot less. However, be careful with that thought, and make sure you also account for the cost of boxes, tape, shipping labels, etc. And more importantly, calculate the cost of your time. Shipping can be a hateful process that usually takes much longer than you anticipate.

Plus, fulfillment companies receive price breaks from shipping companies because they have so much volume. You won't be able to get nearly as good rates.

Ex Works vs FOB

When requesting quotes from manufacturers, you'll likely see the terms "FOB" and "Ex Works." These designations determine how your games get to the port where they'll get on containers to be shipped around the globe.

If your game is marked Ex Works, that means you are responsible for all the shipping after the games are on the manufacturer's loading dock. You have to organize pickup of the shipment as well as trucking, delivery to the terminal, customs, and freight.

FOB stands for Free On Board which places the responsibility for

local charges like packaging, loading fees, delivery to port, export duty and taxes, and origin terminal fees on the manufacturer. But don't let "free" fool you; the manufacturer builds the expenses into the cost to produce your game.

In the vast majority of situations, you'll want to go with FOB. It's easier and means less for you to have to worry about. In theory, you could save some money by handling things yourself with Ex Works, but the factory likely gets better rates with local companies than you will. (And you probably don't speak Chinese.)

Insurance

Get insurance on your shipment. You likely won't need it, but it's fairly cheap, and it'll protect you if your shipping container happens to fall off the cargo ship during a storm or if the delivery truck gets into an accident.

Timelines

International shipping takes a LONG time, and it can be delayed for all sorts of reasons. When your shipping company gives you a timeline, go ahead and add a month to that as a buffer.

Friendly Shipping

You've likely seen the country badges indicating "friendly shipping" on a Kickstarter campaign page. It's called "friendly" for one of three reasons:

The product is shipped from within the country or region, which means they avoid import fees and taxes. In other words, you ship your games to a fulfillment company inside a region like the European Union, and then the games are shipped to backers from there.

The product's cost doesn't exceed the country or region's tax threshold. For example, the country's tax threshold is \$25 but your game only costs \$19. This is different depending on the country/region.

The product is in a category exempt from an extra tax or fee. For example, many countries don't charge a Value Added Tax (VAT) on books.

To find the friendly shipping badges created by Jamey Stegmaier, go to boardgamedesignlab.com/badges.

Region Boxes

When shipping games in the United States, there's a little known trick that can save you quite a bit of money. The United States Postal Service has "flat-rate" boxes and charges a set rate on a package no matter how heavy it is (up to a certain point). However, they also have what are called "region boxes" that have to be ordered online, and these boxes are bigger and get better rates than the typical flat-rate boxes.

They currently come in two sizes: Region A and Region B, and each carries a different shipping rate. So, if you're shipping games yourself or if your fulfillment company offers this as an option, it's definitely worth looking into. All my latest games have been designed to fit in these boxes which will cut down on my shipping costs.

Combined Shipping

If you know of another publisher who is manufacturing games around the same time as you are, it's a good idea to reach out to them to see if they want to combine ocean freight with you. You can save quite a bit of money by partnering with them to share the same shipping container. You'll have to do some extra logistics if the games are ultimately going to different fulfillment centers, but it's often still worth it.

Kirk Dennison's Advice

I want to highlight what Kirk Dennison said about shipping and fulfillment in his interview from earlier in this book. Kirk has shipped quite a few games and teaches seminars on the subject, so he definitely knows what he's talking about:

Adopt a healthy perspective up front and accept that things will go wrong during the fulfillment process because there are way too many variables outside of your control. You will spend more money than expected, games will be delivered later than you anticipated, and some backers will be disappointed with the condition in which their games arrive.

Here are 3 practical steps to follow:

1. **Roll up your sleeves and do the hard work** (or pay someone to do this for you).
2. As early as possible, create a fulfillment cost spreadsheet. It should account for the estimated weight and dimensions of each of your products and the associated shipping costs to each country, along with the freight costs, VAT or import taxes, and payment processing fees on the amount you charge for shipping. Plan on a 10-15% increase in shipping prices for the next year.
3. **Communicate with partners early and often.**
4. You should get quotes from multiple fulfillment partners in each region of the world and compare the partners based on feedback from other Kickstarter creators, their rates, and their communication. Set appropriate expectations up front, and treat your partners well!
5. **Budget for everything going wrong.**
6. Add buffer time at each stage of the fulfillment process. In total, expect it to take around twelve weeks from the date your manufacturer says your games will be ready for pickup to backers receiving their games. Moreover, add an extra 5-10% buffer for unexpected costs related to freight and fulfillment (in addition to the 10-15% price increase for next year's shipping costs).

Instructions for Fulfillment Centers

On his Kickstarter blog, Jamey Stegmaier posted this great list of

instructions for working with a fulfillment center. You can find this and a lot more great info here: stonemaiergames.com/the-current-state-of-worldwide-fulfillment-2019/

I try to be abundantly clear every time we work with a fulfillment center. Feel free to copy and paste the instructions below (or add/subtract from them) the next time you fulfill a project:

1. Ship all packages so they do not require a signature for delivery.
2. **Send customers their tracking number by e-mail on the same day that their order leaves the facility** (not when the label is made and no later than the day after the package departs). Also, it's crucial that backers see their FULL address on tracking notifications, not a partial address that will cause them to freak out and wonder if we forgot half of their information. If you need to identify the contents of each package for tracking, the label should read " _____."
3. **Please send me a spreadsheet of tracking numbers and couriers within 2-3 days of fulfillment completion.** I can answer 90% of customer service questions if I have that data.
4. **If an order is sent in multiple packages, please make sure the customer knows that they're receiving more than one package.** That will prevent a lot of customer confusion and frustration.
5. Please pack the products with **plenty of cushioning** around the es, corners, and between differently sized components.

Possible Shipping Partners

To see a huge, detailed list of international shipping partners, go here: boardgamedesignlab.com/shipping-partners

Further Reading

For a TON more information and articles on nearly every aspect of shipping, logistics, and fulfillment, go here: boardgamedesignlab.com/kickstarter/#shipping

Chapter 19:

Turning Backers into Raving Fans

If you want to create a sustainable publishing company that isn't just a flash in the pan, you'll have to go above and beyond with both your games and customer service. You'll need to consistently exceed backers' expectations, and if you really want to stand the test of time, you'll need to turn backers into more than just customers. To really last, you'll need them to become raving fans.

What Is a Raving Fan?

Ken Blanchard, in his book *Raving Fans* (which I highly recommend), coined the term to describe a person who is so overwhelmed and impressed by the customer service they've received from a company that they can't stop telling everyone about it.

A raving fan isn't just someone who buys your product. They're a person who buys your product, posts about it on social media, gives copies of it as gifts, answers rules questions on BoardGameGeek, gives you feedback, and lines up to back your next project on day one.

Why Are They Important?

Companies with even just a small contingent of raving fans are much more likely to have breakout success on their Kickstarter campaigns. Having just a few hundred people who show up on day one and then post often on social media can lead to a project having thousands of backers overall.

They act as ambassadors for your game and provide invaluable marketing that's much more trustworthy than a preview video you paid for. With so many games hitting Kickstarter every year now, it's becoming increasingly more difficult to stand out and get noticed. However, raving fans act as your ground game to get the word out and bring people to your company's door.

How to Create Raving Fans

It's all about expectations. When a person buys something, they have certain expectations about the product based on its price, the marketing language surrounding it, its weight, the pictures on the box, etc.

And if the product meets the customer's expectations, they don't think anything of it. The product simply did what it was supposed to do. However, when a product goes above and beyond the customer's expectations, that person is likely to become a raving fan. (And keep in mind this also works in the opposite direction if the product fails to meet the expectations.)

So, the best way to create raving fans is by underselling and over-delivering. If you claim your game is the best thing to ever hit the market, you're setting up an expectation that it will never live up to. So, you have to be careful with your messaging and not create a false expectation that turns into a letdown. There are lots of really good games out there that had overblown expectations and ended up with poor ratings and bad reviews. It wasn't that they were bad games; they just failed to live up to the expectations.

This is why "hype" can be a dangerous thing. You obviously want a bit of hype to increase the likelihood that your game gets discovered, but having too much can create an impossible expectation that ultimately leads to a game's failure in the marketplace.

Now, that doesn't mean you should position your game or project as being "just okay" or "it's alright." You can't undersell it so much that people don't actually want to buy it. Instead, you need to communicate honestly about the project to set correct expectations and then do everything you can to overdeliver.

Avoid absolutes in your messaging like "best," "greatest," "only," etc. Instead of telling people how they should feel about the game, tell them about the game itself. Use your marketing language to put them inside the game's world and immerse them in the theme.

I'll give you an example: *Wingspan*, from Stonemaier Games, is one of the highest-rated games of all time. It's sold hundreds of thousands of copies and even won the Kennerspiel des Jahres award which is given to the "best game of the year." So, this game could claim to be the "best" and have a pretty good case for it. But pay attention to how the game is described on the Stonemaier website:

Wingspan is a competitive, medium-weight, card-driven, engine-building board game from designer Elizabeth Hargrave and Stonemaier Games. It is the winner of the prestigious 2019 Kennerspiel des Jahres award.

You are bird enthusiasts—researchers, bird watchers, ornithologists, and collectors—seeking to discover and attract the best birds to your network of wildlife preserves. Each bird extends a chain of powerful combinations in one of your habitats (actions). These habitats focus on several key aspects of growth:

- Gain food tokens via custom dice in a birdfeeder dice tower
- Lay eggs using egg miniatures in a variety of colors
- Draw from hundreds of unique bird cards and play them

The winner is the player with the most points after 4 rounds.

*If you enjoy *Terraforming Mars* and *Gizmos*, we think this game will take flight at your table.*

Notice how everything is laid out and how precise the language is. They tell you what kind of game it is, and then they immerse you into the theme. After that, they give you a few highlights about the game's components and tell you how to win. And they end by telling you what games are similar.

There's no absolute language or telling you how to feel about the game. They don't go into grand detail to describe the game's components (which are immaculate). They simply tell you about the game, show you pictures of it, and let you create an expectation.

THEN, they overdeliver.

Instead of asking players to roll dice on the table like normal, they

provide you with a beautiful, 3d dice tower that looks just like a birdhouse. Instead of laying cards out next to the board like most games, they provide you with a custom, plastic tray. Instead of cardboard tokens with eggs printed on them, you get painted, wooden eggs that look good enough to eat. Instead of a cheap, flimsy rulebook, you get a ruleset printed on the nicest paper they could buy. And the list goes on.

Nearly every inch and ounce of the game delivers more than what was expected. And that's how you create raving fans.

Creating a Community vs Selling a Product

The good news is that the very nature of Kickstarter makes it easier to turn customers into raving fans because your campaign gives you the opportunity to do more than just sell a product. You can create a community.

You're able to communicate directly with backers, and they're able to communicate with each other. You can work together to improve the game, and you can give them things to make them feel special.

If someone buys your game from a store, you can't send them a personal message of thanks. You can't send them a survey to determine expansion content. You can't do much of anything to interact with that customer. It's merely a transaction.

But on Kickstarter, you can go above and beyond to make backers feel at home. You can invite them into a community. Don't waste that opportunity.

You're in the Customer Service Industry

A lot of creators just want to design cool stuff, put it out into the world, and get paid. There's nothing wrong with that mentality, but please realize Kickstarter is more than just a preorder store. When you launch a campaign, you aren't just selling something; you're also entering into the customer service industry.

There is an expectation from backers for you to be kind and courte-

ous in your interactions with them. They expect you to be active in the comments section and to answer questions in a timely manner. They expect regular updates on the status and progress of the project. And they despise being taken for granted.

The long term success or failure of your company can be determined by how you treat your backers. And the cheapest and easiest way to overdeliver is by making customer service an absolute priority. It costs nothing to be kind and empathetic, and responding quickly to backers with helpful information will go a long way in turning them into raving fans.

Chapter 20: **Online Resources**

Here are the absolute best places online to find a ridiculous amount of content covering every aspect of Kickstarter. Going through these resources and taking notes will put you much further down the path to success than just winging it and hoping for the best.

Kickstarter Best Practices

Before you even think about running a campaign, make sure you read and understand Kickstarter's rules, guidelines, and best practices. Here are the main two places to find that information:

kickstarter.com/help/handbook

kickstarter.com/rules

kickstarter.com/rules/prohibited

Kickstarter Blogs

There are lots of blogs out there with great information, but here are the best three. These sites contain years of content from experts who blazed the Kickstarter trail.

stonemaiergames.com/kickstarter/

jamesmathe.com/

leagueofgamemakers.com/tag/kickstarter/

The Resource Hub

Over the last five years, I've been collecting links to all the best board game design articles, blog posts, infographics, etc on the internet and organizing them into one place. At the following link, you'll find all the Kickstarter content you'll need from start to finish.

boardgamedesignlab.com/kickstarter

Art

Here are my favorite places to find artists, art, and icons.

artstation.com

fiverr.com

vecteezy.com

thenounproject.com

game-icons.net

Prototypes

Here are my two favorite companies for prototypes and components.

thegamecrafter.com

printplaygames.com/

Manufacturers

If you're looking for a manufacturer to print your game, here's a long list of options.

boardgamedesignlab.com/manufacturers

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CARLA KOPP

designer, developer, publisher

I'd love to help you bring your project to life! I started Weird Giraffe Games in 2016 and I have a ton of experience in design, development, Kickstarter, and publishing with a focus solo design and accessibility.

I offer a variety of consulting services for your board game publishing project.

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- Project Management

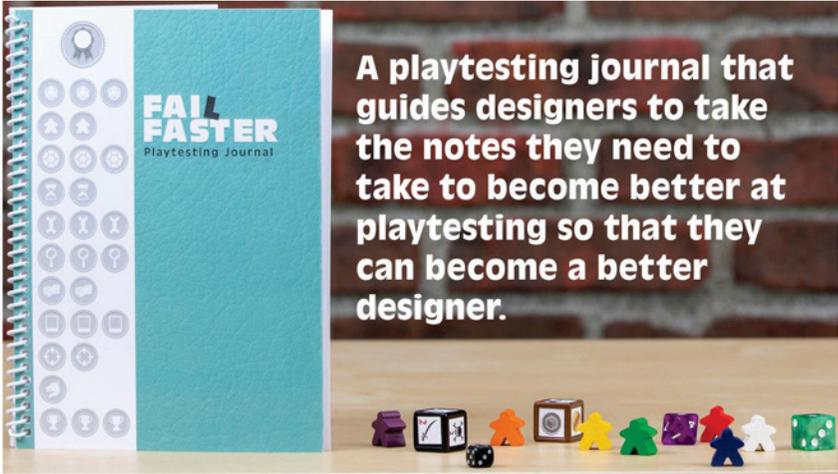
Find out more:

- Email me: contact@weirdgiraffegames.com
- Set up a free appointment here: carla-kopp.as.me
- Check out my website: weirdgiraffegames.com/carla

“Weird Giraffe Games has a good track record of building good solo modes into their games.”

Jeremy, Jambalaya Plays Games

“I'm here to say that Carla from Weird Giraffe Games is designing some underrated solo experiences, and if you play solo games at all you NEED to pick up one of these games.” – David, Cardboard Clash



FEATURES



- Keep track of your playtester names
- Breakdown scores for post-game analysis
- Time your setup, explanation and play
- Guidance on what to observe
- Catalogue winning player's strategy
- Reminder to take end game photo
- Gather feedback from testers with questions that change on every page
- 36 different ProTips

OTHER TOOLS INCLUDED

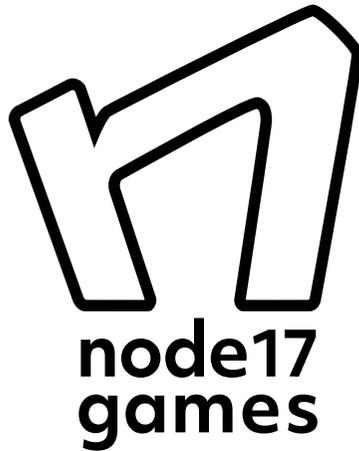
- Earn stickers as you perform key behaviours. Level up as a designer! Stickers are placed on front cover for all to see
- Game idea generator to help you come up with new concepts
- Goal setting page to keep you on track
- Tools while playing: Scoreboard, random dice rolls (2d6, 1d8, 1d10, 1d20), random letters, metric and imperial ruler
- Contract checklist & Manufacturing guidelines



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