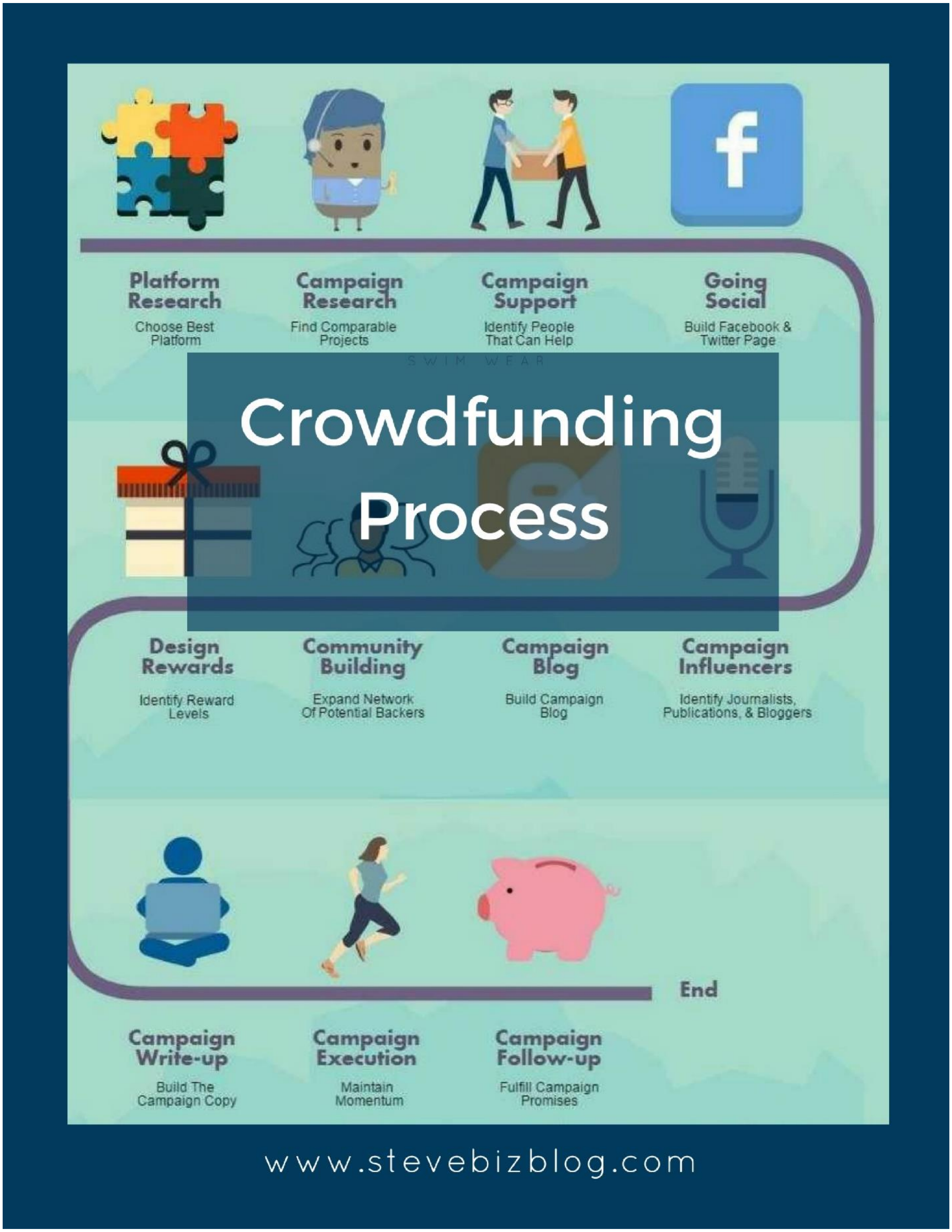
Platform Research
Choose Best Platform
Campaign Research
Find Comparable Projects
Campaign Support
Identify People That Can Help
Going Social
Build Facebook & Twitter Page
Crowdfunding Process
Design Rewards
Identify Reward Levels
Community Building
Expand Network Of Potential Backers
Campaign Blog
Build Campaign Blog
Campaign Influencers
Identify Journalists, Publications, & Bloggers
Campaign Write-up
Build The Campaign Copy
Campaign Execution
Maintain Momentum
Campaign Follow-up
Fulfill Campaign Promises
End
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Process Overview

So, you have a gem of an idea and want to get it off the ground. The first question is how much it will cost and can you come up with the money.

We know that going to a lending institution like a bank to secure a business loan is an unlikely option and attracting a bunch of investors other than family members is a stretch. However, conducting a crowdfunding campaign to raise seed money and prove that the market will embrace and pay money for your idea sounds appealing.

The first step, regardless of which options you decided to ultimately take, is to figure out just how much funding you will need to raise. Tools like our Startup worksheet and Cash Flow statement, found on our [Free Downloads] page can give you a good start at understanding your financing requirements. However, most successful businesses begin with some kind of plan.

As with most businesses, it is best to shape your business idea with the [Business Model Canvas] and then use the data to write a business plan. At the end of the planning process, you will need to determine how to fund your idea.

If crowdfunding is the right way for you to raise money, it is not a as simple as launching a campaign and waiting for the money to roll in. A successful campaign takes work. You do not want to become one of the failed statistics after all. In fact, there are eleven distinctly different steps to a successful crowdfunding campaign:

Platform Research

When it comes to campaign research, it is all about researching what projects work best on each platform to determine which is the best platform to launch your campaign. See 16 Popular Crowdfunding Platforms to understand the objectives of each platform.

In most cases, platform research should take you about a week or so to do effectively. Using the Google search engine is an effective way to start your research. This approach helps you find campaigns similar to the one you intend to launch.

First, try to Google a "platform" followed by the "your product idea." For example, say you have an idea for a new Mini Drone product. You might enter "KickStarter Mini Drone" to get a list of similar campaigns to start your research. Another Google search may be to enter simply "Crowdfunding Mini Drone."

Once you locate similar products search the campaign for the following information:

- What was their initial fundraising target goal?
- How much were they able to raise?
- How many backers did they have?
- What were the pledge amounts?
- What rewards did they offer?
- What was their video message like?
- How did they connect with the backer's emotions?
- What was the length of their campaign?
- What was the timeline to deliver their rewards?
- Click on the comments section to see what was said about the campaign.
- Look at their website or blog. What you can learn from them?

To aid you on this process download my Crowdfunding Platform Research Form

Campaign Research

After you complete your platform research, the next step is for you to locate and reach out to each of the campaign owners or founders. Ask them if they would be willing to discuss their campaign experience. In most cases, campaign research should take you about another week or so to do effectively.

You may want to begin by sending the campaign owners a brief introduction email, saying you saw their campaign and were impressed. Add that you are thinking about launching a similar campaign. Many platforms include a link for you to contact the owner or founder. Ask if they can spare a few minutes for you to pick their brain about their experience. If they agree to speak to you, here is a list of information you should try to glean from the discussion:

- Is there any topic specific advice they could share?

- Did they find any social group (e.g., LinkedIn or Facebook) that yielded good interest from members?
- Did they use any online forums or websites that proved successful?
- How about blogs or bloggers that were receptive to guest posts?
- Ask them for a list of journals or publications that were interested in hearing about their campaign.
- What was their biggest challenge?
- If they used Kickstarter or another platform with built-in analytics, see if they are willing to share their campaign analytics with you so you can see who visited the campaign in detail. You will want to see where they came from, what page they sat on, how long they sat on it, when they donated, and how they backed the project.
- If they had to do it all over again, what would they have done differently?
- Finally, see if they will provide you the list of their backers.

As a follow-up, you can enter the campaign name into a Google search engine to find:

- A list of activities they used to promote their campaign
- Posts they used to promote campaign
- The websites they used to promote their campaign

To learn want what was said on Twitter about their campaign, you can use the twitter advances search feature to see tweets that discussed their campaign.

To aid you on this process download my Crowdfunding Campaign Research Form

Campaign Support

Campaign support is about introducing your campaign to a list of people that might be interested in not only supporting you, but in helping you throughout the process.

In most cases, campaign support should take you about 2 weeks or so to do effectively.

At this point, your making people aware of the fact you will be launching a campaign in the near future. Your goal is not only to ask them for advice to help them feel engaged with your campaign, but also to get them to agree to share your campaign communications and blog posts once you begin developing them.

During campaign outreach, your goal is to bring people into the campaign and create a sense of community. Specifically, you will want to reach out either in person or by phone to your friends and family to discuss your campaign idea and solicit their advice, support, and involvement. When you find an eager party, see if they will be able to help with specific efforts such as writing and sending emails to potential backers, writing posts for the campaign blog, or answering questions about the campaign with potential backers. There is so much work associated with running a campaign that having a team to help you will improve your ability to wage a successful campaign.

Once you have solicited support from your friends and family, it is time to reach out to the backers of similar campaigns. This is the list that you got from other campaign owners in the campaign research step. Contact the backers and say that you see that they have backed similar campaigns. Tell them that you would like their feedback on your upcoming campaign. Now is NOT the time to ask them to pledge their support.
Look at forums for crowdfunding in general and by category to locate potential backers.

Use Google to help search for forum names. For example, if you are selling a water bottle for runners, search "forum running." Go to the forum and introduce yourself. Offer some valuable comments. Perhaps you can write a comment indicating the need to think more about the need for proper hydration during a race. Answer other posts and float the idea that you are thinking about a campaign for a new hydration device for runners and want feedback.

Going Social

The next phase is focused on social shares. In most cases, the going social phase should take you about a week or so to do effectively. Developing a campaign Facebook page should be step one. Once your campaign Facebook fan page is complete, you should reach out to the other campaign owners you spoke to a few weeks earlier and ask them to tweet or share your campaign Facebook page through their social network. It is always a good practice to ask them if you can help them in any way since they have been so helpful to you. That way it never appears like your relationship with them is only a one-way street.

Utilize Facebook group pages. Search for an affinity with the topic of your campaign. Engage with the groups to build trust by getting involved in community discussions.

Search Twitter for hashtags. I find Hashtagify and RiteTag to be particularly helpful in identifying popular hash tags. Another valuable way to locate active twitter shares for a similar campaign is to use Twitter's advanced search function. In addition to Facebook and Twitter, you may also want to search Pinterest to find related boards.

Campaign Influencers

The next phase is focused on finding and engaging journals, publications, bloggers, and any other influencers that cover your area.

In most cases, finding and reaching out to campaign influencers should take you about a week or so to do effectively. However, before contacting influencers, create a clear story idea that their readers will want to hear about. Perhaps you can tie your campaign to an upcoming event they are reporting on.

When it comes to working with journals, publications, and blogs, remember that lead times may be long so it is best to reach out to them early.

A friend of mine, Drew Johnson, ran a successful reward-based crowdfunding campaign for TechWears. He said that he underestimated the lead time of journalists and bloggers. Drew spent a lot of time courting journalists and bloggers prior to his campaign but underestimating lead times produced articles that did not coincide with his campaign window. Therefore, these outlets never achieved the desired effect of boosting campaign awareness when people could still make pledges. In fact, according to Drew, most of the stories appeared after his campaign was over, doing him little good with respect to this campaign's funding goal.

Moreover, he stated that some of the journalists and bloggers only became aware of him after he launched his campaign, which didn't allow them time to produce the article to bring awareness to his campaign. When asked what advice he would share, he stressed trying to find the journalists, bloggers, and publishers early enough in the process so that their articles effectively create precampaign buzz or directly support the campaign fund raising efforts.

To help locate reporters, you can use the HARO website, which is an acronym for "Help A Reporter Out". This website connects you to reporters with information sources. Other sites to help locate reporters are PressRush, ProfNet, and SourceBottle.

Once you have located all of the influencers in your campaign area, you need to make a special effort to personally engage with the most influential of them. Since engaging the right influencers can make or break your campaign, ask your support group to do other campaign outreach activities while you focus on the most influential contacts.

One way to compare the influence of a blog or person's website is to add either the "Alexa" and/or "Complete" browser extensions to your favorite browser. These extensions measure the popularity of sites. I personally use Alexa.

When I go to a particular blog or website, I click the "Alexa" extension and look at their global and US traffic ranking numbers. The lower the number the better their rank. I also look to see if the site is trending up or down in its influence. Additionally, I often search the site's analytics for more details on their traffic. You should also go to their Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter pages to see how many followers they have.

A way to find even more influencers is to search your topic area in Google and document the top 10 sites. You can then use a tool like moz open site explorer to do a deep dive into each site. Incidentally, you can get a free 30-day trial, which will be more than enough time for you to do your research. Enter each of your top 10 URLs. For each search, scroll down to Inbound Links and filter the results by their domain authority (DA). Copy the top 20 or so URLs, leaving you with about 200 URL in total to research. Visit each site and find the author's email or other contact info. Reach out to them to see if they would be interested in doing a piece about your campaign.

Campaign Blog

Build and maintain your campaign blog in conjunction with community building. Community building is discussed as part of the next step. These steps are conducted simultaneously. When combined, they are the most time-consuming portion of the entire crowdfunding campaign.

In most cases, these steps will take you about 9 weeks or so to do effectively. One of the most common ways to build a community is through the use of a campaign blog. This is why we are focusing on this topic as its own step.

When it comes to blog content, it is most effective to locate a few experts that are already part of your network and sent them an email with a few questions you would like them to reply to. When they reply to your email, take your questions and their answers and reformat the email into an interview post for your blog.

In addition to using this interview technique for folks already in your network, try reaching out to authors that have recently published a book on a similar topic and conduct an interview with them too. Since authors are eager to promote their new book, many will be surprisingly receptive to your offer since your post will also be a plug for their book.

You may also choose to do a phone interview to capture the information. When it comes to phone or in-person interviewed, I suggest that you format the information and then ask the interviewee to review the final post to make sure that you captured their information correctly. Since the process of distilling a phone or in-person interview into text allows you to have some creative license regarding the message, all too often key concepts can be misinterpreted.

One of the things that bugs me the most with journalists is that most journalists never ask for a review of their story. They just print their interpretation of the interview. When I was a technical writer, all the content is reviewed and approved by the subject matter experts before it is disseminated. I think that journalists should extend this same courtesy to all interviewees. However, this has not been my experience in journalism. Whenever I read a story that a reporter wrote after I gave them an interview, it almost always contained misinformation. In the end, I often resent the journalist for publishing incomplete or inaccurate information. In summary, treat the interview process like you are a technical writer and not a journalist.

Another effective technique to capture blog content is to use Skype to make the phone call and record it. I use a free tool called MP3 Skype Recorder to record the interview and I use a relatively cheap snowball microphone that I plug into my PC. I make the call via Skype and activate the recorder software. What I like about this solution is that it automatically switches between the caller and you so there is no need to buy a mixing board. You can hear the other party through the PC speakers as if they were physically sitting next to you.

You can then save the recording and treat it like a podcast. You can even edit it with another free tool I use called Audacity. If you want to turn the recording into text, you have the option of sending the MP3 file to a transcription service for a small fee.

However, for a free option you can play the audio while running the free version of the Dragon Speech to Text app that runs on the iPad. Then all you have to do is add who is speaking to the resulting text file and publish it on your blog.

Keeping up with the blog content is a great job for one of the helpers you enlisted earlier.

Community Building

Now is the time to send the influencers on your list an email and asked them for advice about your campaign. Be sure to mention that you read their post/article/book. If you mention that you enjoyed reading it, you will increase the likelihood they will reply to your request.

Prioritize your list of influencers and focus on sites and people that are the most active. Read and share information in your topic area to build trust with them before also asking them to support your campaign. Even if you do all the right things, expect about a 10% return rate on your cold contacts. However, with a few good social shares, some campaigns have been able to boost their return rates to 15-20%.

Start sending out emails to your list as you count down to the launch to build momentum. Now is the time to try to get committed backer support prior to your launch date. If necessary, make their pledge contingent on reaching a specific funding level. For example, you might say, "Can I count on you to support us at the platinum level if we raise 20% percent of our goal?" If they are not receptive, ask, "How about supporting us at the gold level?" If necessary, go all the way and ask, "Will you at least support us at the $10 High-Five level?" If you don't ask, most people will not pledge because this is the point in the campaign where you begin to ask for their pledges. Based on successful campaigns, your goal should be to get about 20% of your target amount in pre-launch pledges from your network.

Another effective way to build a community is to have a launch party. The best launch parties build enthusiasm for the campaign and have a creative twist to make them memorable. Perhaps you can buy a canvas and some paint from an art supply company and encourage everyone at the launch party to contribute to a painting you will post on the blog and giver away as a reward after the campaign. Don't be afraid to be creative and don't forget to ask for pledges at the launch party.

Your list of committed backers is different from the ideal backer since your committed backers at this point likely include family and friends. Drew Johnson, a colleague of mine that ran a successful reward-based crowdfunding campaign for TechWears
shared the following advice. If he had it all to go over again, he would have scrubbed his look-a-like list when he used a Facebook ad campaign to find backers.

Drew had collected a list of about 500 people who signed up at his various demos and craft fairs where he demonstrated and sold his unique TechWears products. His initial thinking was that since the 500 on his list stopped by his booth, engaged with him in a discussion about his product, and were willing to sign-up for his mailing list that they were all potential backers. Unfortunately, many on the list were "tire kickers" who signed his list more out of politeness rather than genuine interest. When he used his list in a Facebook look-a-like ad campaign, the demographic he targeted was not the audience that was actually looking to buy geek-wear as he calls it.

In the end, it cost him more money and did not get him the conversion rate he was hoping for from the ad campaign. Therefore, if you plan to use a Facebook ad campaign and use a look-a-like list, you should scrub your list to remove those people not likely to be your ideal backer.

Designing Reward

If you are doing a reward-based campaign, one of your tasks is to come up with your reward levels. Equity-based and donation/charity-based campaigns generally do not offer any rewards to backers for their contributions other than ownership or listing the backers contribution level on the campaign pages. Your research from similar campaigns should give you a pretty good idea of the different types of rewards and the popularity of those rewards.

Most campaigns have a "high-five" or similar entry support level that is in the $1-$10 range. As you move up the levels, most rewards are commutative. The average campaigns have between 9 and 12 levels. Below are some examples.

- $10 pledge gets you a personal email or name listed on our website.
- $10 to $50 gets you a personal message plus a logo embossed rubber wristband.
- $50 to $100 gets you the above rewards plus handmade tile for your office.
- $100 to $200 gets you the above plus a personalized brick with your name in front of our offices.
- Etc.

Below are some other reward ideas.

- T-shirt or wristband with brand logo
- Buttons
- Creative naming rights

- Character name in a story if you are writing a book
- Signed picture of our staff
- Signed memorabilia like copies of patent application or engineering drawings
-

With all rewards, it is a good idea to add a sense of urgency by either limiting the number of rewards at a specific level or limiting the time that a specific level will be available.

Campaign Write-up

With all the per-work you have done to this point, designing and writing up the campaign will on the platform you chose should take you no more than 1 week in most cases. When it comes to the actual elements within your page design, the best campaigns have the following elements:

- **Title** – The best title is "project name: tagline." For example, "Pogo: Your Personal Robot."
- **Video** – The title should be followed by a short video. According to Kickstarter, campaigns with a video are 15% more likely to get funded than campaigns without a video. If you use a video, you should be featured in it someplace since the campaign is selling you. Because of it importance in converting visitors into donors you may want to consider hiring a professional to help you do your video.
- **Pitch** – The video is followed by a pitch message that is about 2 paragraphs in length. The pitch should not take any more than 30 seconds to read. Most visitors will only get to this point so be sure to make your pitch relateable. Put yourself in the cause's shoes. The copy you write must create a sense of urgency to encourage the backer to pledge now. The pitch should create a "wow tell me more" moment in the reader so they continue reading. Finally, the pitch should include a request for a pledge as well as a request to become part of your team.
- **Image** – Follow the pitch with an image. Like with the video, you may want to hire a professional photographer that is skilled in capturing emotions. Short of coming up with an original photo, you can use stock photo sites. I like sites such as Flickr.com that contain free photos that you might be able to use for your campaign. If you use Flickr, you can click "Explore," go to "The Commons," and use key words to search for images that you can use for free. I also like to use Google Advanced Image Search tool. To avoid copyright issues, use "usage rights" to filter images you can use.
- **Full Description** – Follow the image with the full description. Too many campaigns include lots of text which is boring. When it comes to appealing to the senses of backers, use images, videos, and even audio in your descriptions to keep your visitors engaged. Audio is a great way to capture testimonials and make your appeal for their support.

Once created, the pictures, video, and audio can be used and reused throughout your campaign in emails, blog, and social media. In the description, make your visitors understand that backing your campaign is about being part of something bigger than themselves. If you are doing an equity financing campaign, a strong draw to get them to be investors is to stress the fact that they can be part of the business before it is publicly available. In the description, include links to websites or blogs. Include social share buttons so they can promote your campaign to their circles.

- **Budget** – Include an itemized budget at a high level to prove you have thought things through.
- **Time** – Include a timeline for the campaign. Be sure to include all your pre-launch activities and schedule for rewards. When it comes to your timeline and schedules, it is best to add additional time here. It is always better to under-promise and over-deliver than to over-promise and under-deliver.
- **Team** – Include a thumbnail image and brief bio of all key team members.

When you have created your first draft of the campaign, wait a day or two and revise the copy. Then, when the day arrives, submit your campaign page to the platform for review. Another lesson Drew Johnson shared with me about his TechWares campaign on KickStarter.com was that when it is important to launch at a specific date and time, be sure to know how the campaign start time is established. Drew made the assumption that he would submit his campaign, get approval, and then be given the opportunity to pick a precise launch date and time. What happened was he submitted his campaign for approval 2-days prior to his ideal launch day and time because he had assumed that it could take as much as 48 hours to get a campaign approved according to the platforms submissions directions. To his horror, the campaign went live nearly two days earlier than he planned, throwing his entire launch schedule into chaos.

Campaign Execution

Most campaigns run 4 to 6 weeks, long enough to gain enough traction, but short enough to maintain a sense of urgency. Most campaigns see a flurry of support at the start as the backers and influencers you reached out to during the outreach phase make their pledges. Also, there typically is a flurry of support near the end of campaign window as the pledge window's closure creates a sense of urgency.

When it comes to planning your launch, make sure that the start or end dates do not fall on holidays or in the middle of the night or you may miss your most productive pledge activity windows. If possible, consider planning the campaign around a conference or event you can go to with a prototype to build awareness about your product and campaign. If your campaign window includes a conference or event, be sure everything for your campaign is mobile friendly. With smart phones and tablets, the people you speak to at an event can be encouraged to pledge right there at the conference or event. Perhaps by pledging at the event they can even receive a special gift or recognition for doing so.

Make sure that the backers you spoke to in the pre-launch stages know how important it is to pledge on the first day so your campaign has a good chance of getting a featured position by showing campaign traction early on.

It is best to make a schedule ahead of time that you will follow throughout the campaign to keep up awareness and momentum.

When you get money from a backer:

- Use an auto responder to thank them and remind them of the importance of their contribution to the success of the effort.
- Call them the next day to thank them personally. It is not about the amount of the contribution as much as it is about community building.
- After a few days, send them another email and ask if they could forward the campaign information to 3 friends or post your campaign on their social media. If they refuse or simply do not follow through, don't stop requesting their help. Studies have shown that after a rejection, the guilt of the rejection makes them more likely to grant a follow-up request. In any communication with backers at any level, be sure to make them feel included by referring to it as "our" project. After they pledge, it is not over. They can still help. Continue to express messages that they are part of something bigger.
- Recognize their contribution on your social media, blog, and campaign to make them feel pride. Think about having a "biggest backer" or "backers of the day" message to encourage competition among backers and perhaps lead to multiple rounds of support from backers.

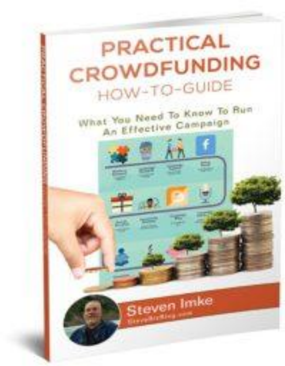
Be sure to include links to your campaign in all emails. You may also want to make several Webcam videos interlaced with other campaign video, pictures, and audio that you can post on your social media platforms.

It is not uncommon for support to drop in the middle of the campaign window. Be sure to keep up momentum by sending updates on funding milestones as they are reached. For example, send out a message when you reach progressive funding milestones (e.g., 20%, 30%, 40% of your goal). Also be sure to send news, development updates, feedback, testimonials, and when you get support from media or bloggers. Don't forget to mention non-monitory supporters in your communications too. As you reach the end of your campaign, contact your backers and offer special add-on rewards. Try to get a matching gift from an earlier backer or agreement to match other contributions.

Campaign Follow-up

Assuming you have met your funding goals, now the work really begins. However, be sure to thank your backers even if your funding goals are not met. Remember it is about community and you may need them in the future. If you ran a reward-based campaign, you made many reward promises. You should be aware that if you do not make good on your rewards, you may be subject to legal liability.

You will want to continue to use the blog and periodic emails to provide updates and document your post-campaign progress. Be sure to include updates on reward distributions. If you are going to miss a deadline for a reward, share this with your backers before the deadline. Some campaigns get funded for way more than their goal and reward fulfillment becomes far more complex logistically than planned. For example, you may have thought that you could source, pack, and ship all rewards yourself. However, if you exceed your goals, you will need to hire and train someone to help you, which takes time and costs money.



This paper is just one section from my book Practical Crowdfunding How-To-Guide *What You Need To Know To Run An Effective Campaign*

The Practical Crowdfunding How-To-Guide is a wisdom-packed book that was written for the entrepreneur considering raising money via a crowdfunding campaign. Crowdfunding is not a simple matter of just putting your campaign on one of the crowdfunding platforms and waiting for the money to roll in. It is much more personal, relies heavily on social media and making network connections before you launch your campaign. In fact crowdfunding shares very little with other forms of raising money.

For most, crowdfunding success can run the gambit, but it does not have to be a game of chance. The author breaks down the process of crowdfunding into 12 distinct steps to locate and attract potential pledges and build momentum and buzz for the campaign. By following the 12 step process the reader will have the best chance of success in reaching your funding goal.

The book Practical Crowdfunding How-To-Guide is a concise and easy to read guide packed with solid advice and examples that will help the entrepreneur achieve the best possible crowdfunding success.