

INTRODUCTION

I've run seven successful Kickstarter projects that together have raised more than a million dollars, and I've consulted on and backed countless others. The success of those campaigns has allowed me to run my board game publishing company, Stonemaier Games, full-time.

Throughout this book I refer to Stonemaier Games in terms of “we” and “our,” since I’m not alone in this endeavor. I have a business partner (Alan Stone), an advisory board, hundreds of “ambassadors,” and thousands of backers (crowdfunding customers).

I designed three of our games—Viticulture, Euphoria, and Tuscany—as well as a game accessory, the Treasure Chest, all four of which have a total of nearly fifty thousand copies in print. To put it in perspective, that’s really good for a small publishing company that has been around for about two years and really bad for, say, Hasbro.

I write a crowdfunding blog where I share my insights, mistakes, research, and observations to provide a detailed template for how other crowdfunders might, I hope, achieve success. When I refer to “the blog” in this book, I’m talking about the Kickstarter Lessons website, not my personal blog.¹ That blog is mostly about my cats.

The crowdfunding blog serves as a complement to this book, but the two are very different. The blog is a step-by-step guide to creating a crowdfunding project and running a campaign. I’ve been told that it contains an almost overwhelming amount of information. So for the readers of this book, I’ve condensed those 125 lessons down to 125 sentences (well, I *tried* to limit myself to one sentence per lesson), found in the Resources section of this book.

They're not a replacement for the full entries, nor do they explain the logic behind the lessons, but if you trust me by the time you reach the end of this book, they're there for you to consider.

A Crowdfunder's Strategy Guide is much more anecdotal than my blog. Whenever I read a book like this, I find myself skipping over the pedantic parts to get to the concrete, real-life examples. So I've tried to fill the book with stories, not lessons.

Several projects I feature in this book fall into the category of "megaprojects." These are projects that wildly overfunded. You can learn a lot from these projects, but it's important to remember that correlation does not equal causation, especially when comparing your project with these. Just because megaproject A launched on, say, July 8 and raised \$10 million does not mean that if you also launch your project on July 8, you will raise \$10 million, too.

When you research megaprojects, dig under the surface a bit before drawing any conclusions. Read the project updates, poke around for a postmortem or lessons-learned post, look into past or future projects to see how their creators' methods changed over time, and so on. Megaprojects are often successful *despite* their flaws and deviations from best practices, and it's up to you to distinguish how they deviated and the resulting impact.

The one common thread between the blog and this book is my belief that you will significantly increase your odds of crowdfunding success if you focus on building community, empathizing with supporters, and developing trust-based relationships. Whenever you're faced with a decision—big or small—simply ask yourself, "What's the right thing for my backers?"

I will systematically prove to you in every chapter of this book that by putting your backers first and connecting with individual backers, you will be a better, happier, more successful creator.

Even though the stories and lessons in this book will increase your odds of crowdfunding success, nothing is guaranteed. This

is actually the great thing about crowdfunding: the crowd will vote with their dollars to tell you whether there is demand for whatever it is you're trying to create. If you put in the legwork and present your idea well, but it still doesn't successfully fund, that's a sign that the world isn't interested. And that's okay. It's a lot better to determine what the demand is before you invest thousands of dollars to make something.

Last, it's important to note that a lot of the examples in this book are tabletop game projects. I run tabletop game projects and own a board game company, so it makes sense that I pay more attention to that category and hobnob with other tabletop game creators more than others. However, the vast majority of the examples I use can apply to *any* category, and I've made sure to include plenty of stories from other categories, not just to reach various types of creators, but also because these stories fascinate me. I've learned just as much from campaigns unrelated to games as I have from those that are.

Now, my friends, it's time to make this book all about *you*.

This page intentionally left blank

You Don't Need to Launch Today

The second-most successful Kickstarter project of all time originally launched six months too soon and failed. But when the Coolest cooler relaunched half a year later, it raised \$13,285,226 from 62,642 backers.

One of the biggest mistakes people make when launching a crowdfunding project is to launch too soon. While the Coolest cooler is an outlier, given its epic level of success, it serves as a great example of how *not* launching today can make a huge impact on your dream project.



FIGURE 1. The Coolest cooler, the product behind one of the most successful crowdfunding campaigns ever held. Reproduced courtesy of Ryan Grepper.