



CROWDFUNDING:

A GUIDE BY BLAST THEORY

Anne Rupert, November 2014

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## SUMMARY OF OUR CAMPAIGN



|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Project name</b>   | Karen – an app that psychologically profiles you as you play   |
| <b>Details of project</b>   | A new artistic app that mixes gaming, storytelling and psychological profiling techniques to deliver a personalised experience |
| <b>Funding goal</b>   | £15,000  |
| <b>Funding achieved</b>   | £17,559  |
| <b>Number of days</b>   | 30<br>(Monday 6th October until Wednesday 5th November)  |
| <b>Platform</b>   | Kickstarter  |
| <b>Number of backers</b>  | 539  |
| <b>% Funding raised through Kickstarter*</b>                      | 23% (£3,958)   |
| <b>Average pledge amount</b>                                      | £32.58   |
| <b>Number of pledges dropped due to payment processing issues</b> | 11 (£173)  |
| <b>Fees paid to Kickstarter</b>                                   | £782.40 (4.5% - we received a 0.5% discount for being Sundance alumni artists)   |
| <b>Payment processing fees</b>                                    | £623.71 (3.59%)  |
| <b>VAT (charged on fees)</b>                                      | £281.22 (1.62%)  |
| <b>Total fees and taxes paid</b>                                  | £1,687.33 (9.71%)  |

\*As opposed to direct mail, social media, our own website etc.

# ABOUT US

## **About Blast Theory**

We are an artists' group based in Brighton, UK. We formed in 1991 and use interactive media to create new forms of performance and interactive art that mixes audiences across the internet, live performance and digital broadcasting. Led by Matt Adams, Ju Row Farr and Nick Tandavanitj, our work explores interactivity and the social and political aspects of technology.

Blast Theory undertook a crowdfunding campaign in October 2014 in order to raise funds for the development of Karen. Anne Rupert was brought in to work with the team and to manage the campaign, led by Business Director Kirsty Jennings.

Anne has compiled this guide based on our research and learning from the campaign.

## **About Me**

After a 10-year career in the housing sector, I gave up my strategic planning job in April 2014 to take a six-month career break. I was lucky enough to work with Blast Theory from August to November 2014, first as a part-time volunteer and then on a full-time six-week contract as Crowdfunding Manager.

When I started with Blast Theory, I could fit my crowdfunding knowledge on the back of a postcard. I learnt everything I've written in this report whilst I was with them. Hopefully the report will help you feel less like you are starting from scratch.

You can read more about my career break adventures in my illustrated blog, [Call of the Wild Geese](#) – or if you want to chat about crowdfunding or anything else, you can email me at [a.c.rupert@gmail.com](mailto:a.c.rupert@gmail.com).

# OVERVIEW

## What is crowdfunding?

Crowdfunding has become increasingly popular over the last few years. It allows individuals and businesses to raise money for a project across a large number of people, where everyone pays a little to make your project happen. In return, they usually receive rewards – this can be the product you are raising money for, or a range of things from badges to T-shirts to bags to workshops.

## Why crowdfunding?

In partnership with Fabrica, Brighton's leading art gallery, Blast Theory received Catalyst funding from Arts Council England in 2013 to build fundraising capacity and diversify income streams. The Catalyst partners had identified crowdfunding as an area to research and test, both as a fundraising and as an audience development tool.

We decided to run a crowdfunding campaign for new artistic app *Karen*. We had been researching and developing this app for two years with partners National Theatre Wales, as well as Professor Nina Reynolds and Dr Kelly Page, and decided to aim for £15,000 in order to fund the minimum amount of development time required to deliver a finished version.

The Catalyst funding allowed us to engage a fundraising consultant to advise on the initial strategy (alongside other initiatives) and employ a Crowdfunding Manager on a fixed-term basis to assist with the planning and running of the campaign, thereby minimising impact on business and creative operations.

## What's involved?

The internet is rife with crowdfunding blogs, videos and tips on what to do and what to avoid. Although some advice is less relevant for arts organisations, a lot of the fundamental principles of crowdfunding are universally applicable. In our experience, the following elements are the building blocks of a successful crowdfunding campaign:

1. **Research:** studying similar (successful and unsuccessful) campaigns and reviewing crowdfunding platforms;
2. **Planning:** particularly sorting your contacts and setting out a strategy;
3. **Building your project:** writing the copy for your project page, making a video;
4. **Rewards:** ensuring your rewards are attractive and you have considered; production/postage costs etc.;
5. **Communications:** mail-outs, social media, press, engaging your backers;
6. **Post-campaign:** production and delivery of rewards, backer communication.

## Before you start

If you are thinking about running a crowdfunding campaign, here are some things to ask yourself before you start:

- What is my community/following? If you don't currently have a lot of rich uncles, Facebook friends/page likes, Twitter followers, or people on your mailing list, you need to think about building these up first. **The great majority of your funding will come from people that already know you and support you.**
- What exactly am I seeking funding for? What is the minimum amount I need to deliver this? **If you achieve your funding target, your backers will expect you to deliver the project – so don't underestimate.**
- Is my project sufficiently advanced to have some credibility with potential backers? **Backers will not fund an idea on the back of an envelope – you need to demonstrate your commitment.**
- Do the benefits of running a crowdfunding campaign outweigh the costs? **Running a crowdfunding campaign is time-consuming, not just during the campaign but before and after.**
- Am I able to cover all the costs associated with running the campaign? **Think about staff time, fees charged by the crowdfunding platform, payment processing fees, rewards production and postage.**

Broadly, the advantages and disadvantages of running a crowdfunding campaign can be summarised as follows:

| Advantages  | Disadvantages   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• New funding stream</li><li>• Ability to test your project before you've fully developed it</li><li>• Opportunity to learn about your audiences</li><li>• Opportunity to reach out to new audiences</li><li>• Backers can be converted to future donors/supporters</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Time required to plan and run campaign</li><li>• Costs: platform fees, payment processing fees (together these add up to c. 10%), cost of producing and posting rewards</li><li>• Reputational risk (if you don't achieve your target or worse, can't deliver your project)</li></ul> |

# RESEARCH

If you've considered all of the above and still want to go ahead, a good place to start is to study other people's campaigns. Look at unsuccessful campaigns as well as successful ones and try to get a feel for what works and what doesn't.

## What crowdfunding platform should I use?

You'll need to decide what crowdfunding platform is most suitable for your project. This will depend on a number of things and there are online tools such as [crowdingin.com](https://www.crowdingin.com) to help you decide.

[Kickstarter](https://www.kickstarter.com) and [Indiegogo](https://www.indiegogo.com) are the most well-known and biggest platforms available and both are open to project creators based in the UK. The main differences between the two are:

- Kickstarter has a bigger market share;
- Kickstarter has stricter criteria for projects;
- Indiegogo offers flexible funding (where you get to keep the money pledged even if you do not reach your target) as well as fixed funding, whereas Kickstarter's model is 'all or nothing'.

Our Fundraising Consultant shared with us other new platforms such as [Sponsume](https://www.sponsume.com) (good for charity organisations) and [Zequ](https://www.zequ.com) (which has a strong focus on start-ups). Blast Theory opted for Kickstarter because *Karen* met its criteria and we were attracted to its wide reach, particularly in the US. It is also a platform that is known among our audiences and we felt the 'all or nothing' model would give us drive to reach our target (see below).

## Funding models: 'all or nothing' or flexible funding?

The idea of not getting any of the money you've raised if you don't hit your target is terrifying. However, there are real benefits to the 'all or nothing' model:

- It creates a sense of urgency with backers;
- It ensures that you receive the right amount of money to deliver your project: if you need £20,000 but only raise £10,000 via a flexible funding model, your backers will still expect you to deliver what you were going to deliver with £20,000 but you'll be £10,000 short.

**Duration:** Again, the idea of raising your target amount in under a month can seem a bit scary. But a longer funding period does not always make you more likely to succeed. The *Karen* campaign was typical in that most pledges came in during the first and last days of the campaign, with less activity happening in the middle period (see the 'Tumbleweed' section below). Stretching this period therefore wouldn't have made a big difference for us. Also, a shorter funding period increases the sense of urgency with backers. **It appears that the 'sweet spot' for campaign duration is around 30 days.**

# PLANNING YOUR CAMPAIGN

We put a lot of work into planning our campaign, which we feel played an important part in its success. Our activity mainly split into the following areas:

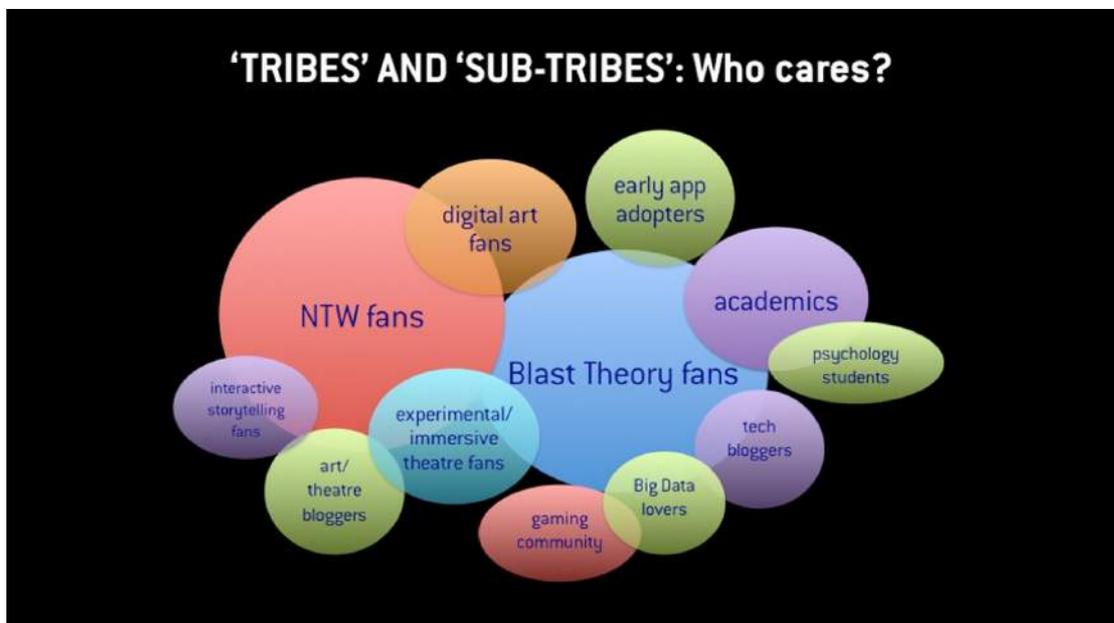
1. Campaign positioning
2. Sorting our contact database into groups
3. Setting out a headline strategy for the campaign

## Campaign positioning

You will have probably thought about this when developing the idea for your project, but for your crowdfunding campaign it is useful to ask yourself two important questions:

- What sets my project/work apart from others?
- Who will care about my project?

The first question may be a little harder to answer if what you are developing is a theatre piece or an artistic app as opposed to a Bluetooth speaker or water-resistant smartwatch. **But it is still useful to think about what makes your particular project unique, as this will help you to market it to potential backers.**



The second question is really crucial. When launching a crowdfunding campaign, you need to accept that most people are not going to care about your project. But the good news is that the 0.00001% who do care, are plenty to help you fund it. The trick is to reach that 0.00001% when you market your campaign.

We found some useful advice online about identifying ‘tribes’ and ‘sub-tribes’ for the *Karen* app. Our ‘tribes’ were people who were most likely to care about the work (mainly existing fans of Blast Theory and National Theatre Wales, our project partners), with the ‘sub-tribes’ being people who may take an interest in it (for instance, fans of immersive/experimental theatre and the indie gaming community).

Once you have answered the ‘who cares?’ question, you can start to work out where your ‘tribes’ and ‘sub-tribes’ might be hiding. Do you already have ways to talk to them (for instance, a mailing list or social media following)? If not, do you know someone who does?

### **Contact database and ‘friendraising’**

Here is an interesting statistic for you: **projects which are 30% funded are 90% likely to reach their funding goal**. If you don’t believe me, maybe you will believe [Kickstarter CEO Yancey Strickler](#).

There are several reasons for this – the most obvious being that people are much less likely to back projects that look like they may not succeed. If there’s money in the kitty already, it sends out a positive message to potential backers.

So ‘friendraising’, as it’s been dubbed, is absolutely crucial to your campaign: **the more money you can raise in the early days of your campaign, the more you increase your chance of success**. You will need to go through your entire address book and work out who is most likely to back your campaign in its early days, before you tell anyone else about it.

At Blast Theory, we spent *many hours* going through our contact database to sort people into the following groups:

- **Contact Group 1: The people closest to us who we thought were most likely to support the campaign**. Our criterion was whether we would feel comfortable phoning these people up, or having a pint with them, and asking for their support. We included people in our contact database, but also friends and family.
- **Contact Group 2: The people who were close to us but who we would feel less comfortable asking for money directly**. These were people who might have aligned interests with the campaign, so we decided to approach them by asking them to spread the word.
- **Arts Organisations: Organisations we had relationships with and who might be able to help us promote the campaign**.
- **Wider Circle: Our mailing list** (all the people who are already interested in our work).

We also decided who in the team would take the lead for each person in the first group, so all of us ended up with a list of people to contact. We then checked and double-checked that we did not have the same person on two different lists, to avoid them being contacted twice.

## Can I fund my own campaign?

No, you can't. We initially found some conflicting advice online, with people suggesting applying the 'bartender trick' which involves putting some money in the campaign at the beginning to make it look more likely to succeed (like bartenders do with the tips jar). But Kickstarter's own website states unequivocally that you cannot pledge to your own campaign and that if you do, you'll be disqualified. Other crowdfunding platforms apply the same rules.

## Headline strategy

Once you have worked out who your target audience is and who your friends are, you are in a good position to set out the strategy for your campaign. Here are the things you should be considering:

- **When do I want to launch my campaign?** Bear in mind that the time you launch will also be your exact end time, so avoid early mornings or late nights. If you are reaching out overseas, also bear in mind the time difference. It's not a bad idea to launch on a Tuesday or Wednesday afternoon, to avoid the post-weekend slump and people taking long weekends.
- **How and when will I approach my friends and contacts?** Think about whether you want to phone or email people, how far in advance you want to approach them, how you will track their responses, thank them and remind them (gently) if necessary.
- **How will I communicate the campaign to everyone else?** You will need to develop a full communications plan, including mail-outs, social media and press.
- **What will I need to do prior to launch?** Make sure you schedule in enough time to produce your campaign video, your project page and any images that you might need for your page or your press releases. You also need to spend a considerable amount of time on your rewards: what will they be, and how much will they cost to produce and send?
- **How will I manage my campaign once it's live?** You need to work out who will respond to messages and comments from backers, produce regular (video) updates, and keep the project page refreshed and up to date.
- **How will I deal with post-campaign logistics** such as rewards production and dispatch?
- **How will I keep my backers engaged after the campaign** and, if possible, convert them into long-term supporters/audience?



## A quick checklist for campaign planning

To help you decide where to focus your efforts, here is a list of everything we prepped in advance:

- ✓ Page copy and images
- ✓ Video
- ✓ Social media plan
- ✓ Press releases and press images
- ✓ Copy for mail-outs to different contact groups
- ✓ Personalised emails to close friends and supporters
- ✓ Backer updates (we planned when we would release these and what we would talk about, whether we needed content from anyone else, what format they'd be in, etc.)
- ✓ Quiet weeks: we thought about how we would deal with those 'tumbleweed' points in the campaign, for instance by focusing on different angles of the campaign, the rewards, etc.
- ✓ Stretch goals

# CONTENT CREATION

## Your crowdfunding video

The most important advice about crowdfunding videos is to make sure that you have one. Projects with videos are much more likely to be funded than projects that don't have one: it's a chance for potential backers to get excited about you and your project, so make it as good as it can be.



Here are some pointers that might be useful:

- **Start by looking at other similar campaigns** and critically review their videos: what works and what doesn't? We thought [this](#) was a great video, for instance.
- **Keep it short:** aim for about 2 minutes if possible and be aware that a lot of people won't watch it all the way through (the *Karen* video was 2m17s and had 35% completed video plays out of a total of 12,059 views).
- **It doesn't have to be super slick.** If your video looks like the trailer for a Hollywood movie, people will wonder if you really need their money. If you don't have advanced shooting, production and editing skills, just keep it simple and authentic.
- Give it a 'human' face: the video is about you, **so make sure you and/or your team explain why the project is important/exciting/fabulous.**
- Think carefully about the story you want to tell, and how you can tell that story in the most concise way. **Edit out everything that isn't strictly necessary to tell the story.** And remember you have your project page, which you can change and edit whilst your campaign is live, to further expand on the story.

- **Ask friends (or strangers) who have never heard of the 'thing' you are crowdfunding to review your video and project page.** It is easy to get lost in your own project, as you know it well. We edited ours a lot based on this feedback (thank you friends!). NB: Kickstarter has a function for you to share a link to your project before it's gone live, which makes the review process very easy.
- If you have any **famous friends**, consider asking them to make an appearance. Our friends at [ONCA Gallery](#) had their patron, Green Party MP Caroline Lucas, endorse the project in their video.

## Your project page

There is no word limit for your project page, but bear in mind that people's attention spans are short and ideally you want them to be able to gather the most crucial information within about 20 seconds of visiting your page. Think about this when you decide on the page layout and make sure you start with a strong statement or summary of what the project is all about.

Here are some pointers you may find useful:

- Put your **social media links and website** at the top of the page, even if they're already included in your biography. This will encourage people to follow you even if they don't pledge straight away.
- **Break up the content** with images. If you have graphic design skills, you can personalise your page by using custom headings.
- Use a selection of **positive reviews, audience responses and feedback** to add credibility. This does not have to relate to the project you're trying to fund, it could be about you/your organisation in general or about previous work.
- **Explain clearly why you need the money**, and what you will do with it.
- Use the space to **showcase and 'sell' your rewards**, but don't take up too much space with this. You could use one image for instance to show a range of rewards, rather than separate images for each item.
- If you haven't produced your rewards yet, you can include **mock-up images** as long as you make it clear that the finished item may differ a little.
- If your campaign starts to attract **press attention**, capitalise on this by adding a section near the top that says 'As Seen In...' with the relevant logos. You can see an example on the [Karen Kickstarter page](#), and [here](#) is another good example.
- You can keep editing the page while your campaign is live, so **keep it under review** and don't be afraid to add new content to keep it fresh.
- Your page will be locked for editing as soon as your campaign is over, so make sure you **add a thank you message and a link to your own website** or donation page right before the end of your campaign.

## Stretch goals

When you look at other crowdfunding campaigns, you'll usually find them littered with ambitious stretch goals. It is really tempting to dream big and encourage people to give you £1m so you can produce a diamond-studded version of your new watering can, or cast George Clooney as your lead actor – but we received some very good advice just before launching our campaign that made us think differently about stretch goals:

- Stretch goals can make you look a bit greedy: it's hard work doing a crowdfunding campaign, so in the first instance focus on your actual funding target before you get carried away.
- Your funding target should be the amount of money you need to deliver your project. Adding a stretch goal too early could suggest that actually, you need more money to do this.
- Your stretch goal message is going to be more powerful if you release it at the right time: first you encourage people to help you make your project, and then you get them behind the stretch target. The *Karen* campaign hit its funding target with two days to go, during which we tried to raise an extra £5k for an Android version of the app. We didn't quite make it, but it did give us something new to talk about in the last days of the campaign and allowed us to reach out to the Android community.
- Be careful about how you launch your stretch goals: acknowledge the support and pledges you have already received before you start shouting about your plans for extra cash.

## Stretch goal released: Android (£20k)



## Rewards

Deciding what rewards to offer to your backers is really important. We found this bit incredibly tricky – we went over it several times, and still ended up with a couple of errors in our rewards descriptions that we only spotted after the campaign went live. Our main advice is therefore: **don't rush this bit**.



Here are some things you should consider when deciding on your rewards:

- **The best reward is the 'thing itself'**: tickets to your show, a download of your app, a copy of your artwork.
- **Backers love to get involved**. Consider whether you can offer your backers a cameo in your show, a chance to choose the subject for your painting, or the opportunity to test your app. We chose to offer in-depth beta testing as one of the *Karen* rewards. Our friends at [ONCA Gallery](#) offered one backer the chance to paint a mural in their courtyard with a local graffiti artist, and our friends at [Coney](#) offered an invitation to a special reception to see the work in progress and make a contribution to further artistic development.
- Your backers are sticking their neck out by backing your project before it has been made, so it's important that they feel that they are getting good **value for money**. If you are intending to sell tickets to your show at £15, offer them to backers for £10 and throw in some extras such as a download of the script.
- **Keep your lower-value rewards digital** to keep down production and postage costs.
- Think about where you set your **lowest reward tier**. The lowest reward tier for *Karen* was £10, and while some people did pledge smaller amounts, the majority of pledges were at that level.
- **We chose not to have a 'digital high five' reward** (such as a thank-you tweet), because we questioned whether people would actually care about that kind of thing.
- You can use **existing items** as rewards, for instance if you have a store cupboard full of old merchandise or props from previous shows. However, think about the 'story'

you are telling with your rewards. Where possible, make sure they relate to the project and don't make it too obvious that you're using your campaign as an excuse to have an office clear-out.

- **Your rewards are what you are 'selling' to potential backers**, so you need to approach them like a salesperson. One sales principle we learnt about is the 'slippery funnel' (yes, that made us giggle too), where each reward level needs to seem more attractive and better value than the last. This is why rewards often include everything from the previous level, plus something extra and exciting to encourage people to pledge more.
- Make sure you take into account **all associated costs** to work out the net margin for each reward. Estimate the number of backers for each level, get quotes from suppliers and don't forget to include postage costs and packing materials in your calculations.
- **Check how much each item would cost to send overseas**, but don't go crazy with your international shipping charges as this might put people off.
- As soon as one person has selected a reward, you can't delete it or edit the description. Even though we checked and double-checked, we realised only when it was too late that there were a couple of mistakes in our reward descriptions - so **make sure you triple- and quadruple-check yours before you go live**.
- You can release **additional rewards** when your campaign is live – this can be a good way to refresh interest halfway through. This is something we had intended to do, but we really struggled to decide what to add so we ended up focusing on our existing rewards. We probably should have spent a bit more time up front planning this so we had an extra reward up our sleeve.
- Consider having a **limited early-bird offer** to entice early backers: you could offer the first 25 backers a ticket to your show for £7.50 instead of £10 for instance. Again, this is something we thought about but never actually did. With hindsight, it may have been effective to offer a limited amount of £7.50 pledges, for instance.

# COMMUNICATION

Having a well thought through communications plan for your campaign will really increase your chances of meeting your funding target. We created a wall planner to help us map out the key milestones.

**Blast Theory** shared a link.  
Posted by Anne Charlotte Rupert [?] · 23 October

This one is for all the tech fans out there. We filmed Artist Nick Tandavanitj and Lead Technologist Alex Peckham talking about the development of #Karenapp and what sets it apart from other apps and games, past and present.

They also explain how you can get involved in the development process as a beta tester!



**Artist Nick Tandavanitj and Lead Technologist Alex Peckham talk about the development of the Karen app**

You should think about the following when drawing up your communications plan:

- **‘Warming up’ your audience** so the campaign doesn’t just land out of the blue. If you haven’t already told them about the project you’re raising funds for, you need to do so at least a few weeks prior to the campaign launch. You could consider using a ‘teaser’ email to spark curiosity, or being up-front about the fact you will be launching a crowdfunding campaign soon for an exciting new project.
- **Contacting your close friends to ask them for their support before the campaign launches to the wider public.** We decided to send them one email around a week

before launch as a heads-up, and then a follow-up reminder when the campaign went live. The initial emails were sent individually, with copy tailored to each person (this took a long time, but we felt it would be more effective than a blanket impersonal email).

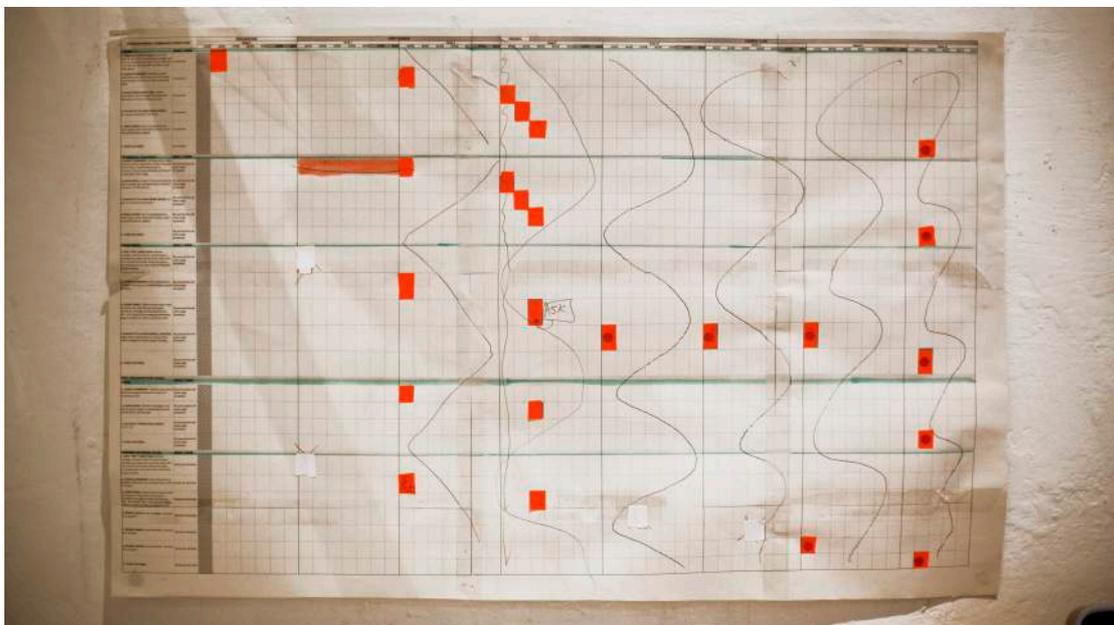
- **When to launch to the wider public:** we gave ourselves three days to ‘friendraise’ before announcing our campaign to the wider world. This gave us a bit of time to get those crucial early pledges in.
- **Social media:** after direct traffic from emails, most of the pledges for *Karen* came via Twitter and Facebook. This is typical for crowdfunding campaigns – and as said in the ‘Before you start’ section, it’s the reason why it’s so important to have built a social media following prior to your campaign. We planned our social media activity as follows:
  - There’s only so many ways you can say ‘give us your money’, so we focused on different angles of the project to keep things interesting. *Karen* is partially a response to the way our private data is being used by governments and companies, so we tweeted and retweeted on that topic using the hash-tag #karenapp.
  - We used social media to showcase our rewards, using images and video content to ‘sell’ them.
  - We used Facebook much more sparingly than Twitter, limiting ourselves to c. two posts a day. Our tweets were much more prolific, although we tried to avoid a scatter-gun approach and used broad themes to plan our tweets.
  - We used Hootsuite to schedule Facebook posts and tweets over the weekend, although we also shared out of hours social media cover between us so we didn’t miss good opportunities.
  - It’s important to keep social media content relevant and up to date, so we used our funding progress to add urgency. ‘We’re only £26 away from hitting £10k – will you make our day?’ is much more effective than ‘Just one week left to back Karen’.
  - We shared a link each time we posted a Kickstarter update, even if the update was ‘backers only’ – in which case people would be encouraged to pledge in order to see the content.
  - It’s important not to spam people on Twitter and Facebook by tweeting or posting to them directly. Most crowdfunding sites frown on this and it could damage your reputation. Instead, we decided to ‘stalk’ people: we researched backer lists for similar campaigns, gathered their Twitter details, and simply gave them a follow. We made sure our Twitter biography sounded as interesting as possible to encourage them to follow us back, and hear about our campaign that way.
- **Your own website:** we chose not to have a separate *Karen* website, although some campaigns do have successful websites and even use these to pre-register interest for the campaign (you could use a ‘enter your email address and we’ll keep you updated’ pop-up box to do this). Instead, we created a *Karen* ‘hijack’ for our own front page, in the shape of a pop-up with auto-playing video and a link to Kickstarter. We

also updated our email signatures and social media biographies and cover images to promote the campaign.

- **Continuation of your normal communications:** your audience and friends will forgive you for a crowdfunding takeover during your campaign, but bear in mind that you will need to continue to communicate other things, such as job vacancies and other news. Be mindful of how your crowdfunding communications fit in with that. Don't forget to share other people's news and appeals, as they will be more likely to help you spread the word about your campaign.

Something you should also consider is **how frequently to email your contact groups**. This is one point where I had a few discussions with the Blast Theory artists, who were understandably cautious about jeopardising valuable relationships with a barrage of crowdfunding emails. In the end, I feel that we struck the right balance:

- We used an individual approach, and judgement, for our closest contacts to avoid annoying these valuable supporters of Blast Theory and being struck off any Christmas card lists.
- For all our contacts, we tracked who had pledged and how much, so we could thank people and make sure we didn't hassle them again if they'd already given us money.
- We sent four crowdfunding-specific mail-outs to our mailing list: one before the campaign, one to announce the launch, one midway through and one right at the very end, with less than 52 hours to go.



Our wall planner in the image above outlines the different contact groups we were contacting. From the top down, these were: 1) Trustees; 2) Contact Group 1 (friends and family); 2) Contact Group 2 (known close fans and supporters of our work); 3) Arts Organisations; 5) Wider Circle

## Telling your story – in the right words

When you're doing a crowdfunding campaign, you need to tell a **story that's bigger than just the project itself**. People are funding *you*, and they also need to feel that they are part of something bigger, more exciting, and more important. We highlighted the fact that *Karen* is a response to how our private data is used by governments and corporations, to put the work in context and give it a wider relevance. Some successful campaigns focus on a mission or broader social goal to emphasise the wider relevance of their project.

The **language** you use when talking about your campaign is extremely important, too. Crowdfunding is completely different to the other types of fundraising you're probably well versed in as an arts organisation, and you need to adapt your language accordingly. People are not donating to a cause; they are backing an exciting project and getting a great reward in return. For that reason, avoid words like 'help', 'appeal' and 'donate', and make sure you don't come across as pleading or desperate. Instead, use language like 'back', 'pledge', 'get involved', 'be part of this' – you get the picture.

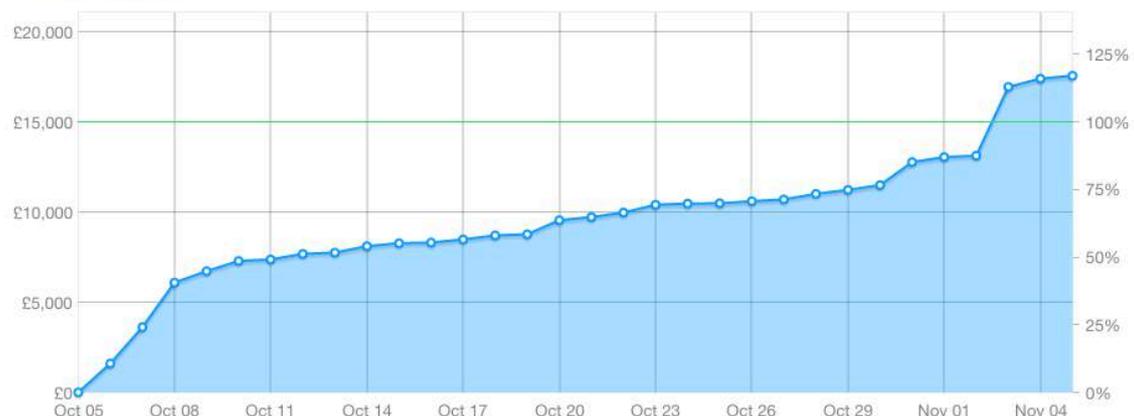
You are also talking to an international audience that may not be familiar with the arts: use punchy, direct language without jargon or acronyms. Don't make assumptions about what will be 'obvious' to them.

Finally, carefully consider the **tone of the emails to your contact groups**, particularly the people you are personally asking for money. This was another point of discussion between me and the Blast Theory artists, whose natural instinct was (understandably) to use a softer, less direct tone. I persuaded them to be a little bolder in asking people for their support. Do what feels natural, but make sure there is a **clear call to action** in your emails

## Tumbleweed

After less than a week, the *Karen* campaign was 40% funded and tracker websites such as [Kicktraq](#) were showing funding predictions of £45,000. Fantastic! But then, things went quiet... Very quiet... Even though we were prepared for it, the mid-campaign lull was still a bit of a shock to the system. After a couple of weeks, our dreams of being able to achieve our

Funding progress



stretch goal started to morph into nightmares of being stuck on £10,000 and not reaching our funding goal.

Unless you're the infamous Potato Salad Man, it's very likely that you'll have a tumbleweed spell in the middle of your campaign. As I said at the beginning, most of your funding will come in during the first and last days of your campaign. Here are a few words of advice about this period:

- Don't panic. Remember Yancey Strickler's words about the 'tipping point' – if you managed to do some good friendraising in the early days of your campaign (even if you didn't quite make 30%), you're very likely to hit your target.
- You can fight the tumbleweed by having a cunning plan up your sleeve. Think about releasing a cool new reward (something which we should have done, but didn't), or hold back your best social media content for this period.
- You can use the middle of your campaign to research further publications to target, people to follow on Twitter, relevant articles and discussions to link to, etc.
- Again: don't panic!

## Backer updates

Backer updates are your best way to communicate with your backers, thank them and keep them engaged, both during and after the campaign.

We published 10 updates during the campaign, and have planned an average of one every two weeks for the period after the campaign. We planned all our updates in advance to make the most of this opportunity to deepen our backers' understanding of *Karen* and Blast Theory.

Here are some things you should consider:

- Use backer updates to **thank your backers** at key points: after the first few days of the campaign, if you've gained backers through being Project of the Day, before the end of your campaign, etc. Basically, you can't thank these people enough so don't hold back.
- **Video updates** are a great way to talk directly to backers. Try to keep these simple and do them in a single take so you don't spend a whole day editing your video. You can film yourself on your smartphone, it doesn't have to be slick.
- Use updates to give backers a **behind-the-scenes** look at the development of your project so they feel part of an exclusive club. We also made this part of our rewards.
- Use the 'backers-only' function to **restrict access** to certain updates, which might encourage people to back your campaign if they want to view the content.
- **Remind backers to tell all their friends and family about the campaign.** Then remind them again. We used every update to reinforce this message.
- If your campaign attracts **press coverage**, include a round-up in one of your updates.
- If you're working with **partners**, ask them to contribute to your updates. Dr Kelly Page, one of the researchers who worked on the psychological profiling content of the

*Karen* app, recorded a video update that gave a new perspective on the project and a new face to promote the campaign.

- Backer updates are a **great way to go into more detail** about certain aspects of your project.
- After your campaign, **continue to tell backers how you're getting on** with developing the project, but also send them pictures of packaging their rewards, taking them to the post office, etc. And don't forget to share these on social media.

Update #4 

Oct 20 2014

## Is Karen just as bad as Facebook? The Blast Theory artists explain what Karen has to do with Big Data, privacy and surveillance

Comment  Like 9 likes



## PRESS

As with everything else, targeting is important when it comes to planning your press strategy. Start by researching which websites and publications covered similar campaigns – here are two handy tips to help you with this:

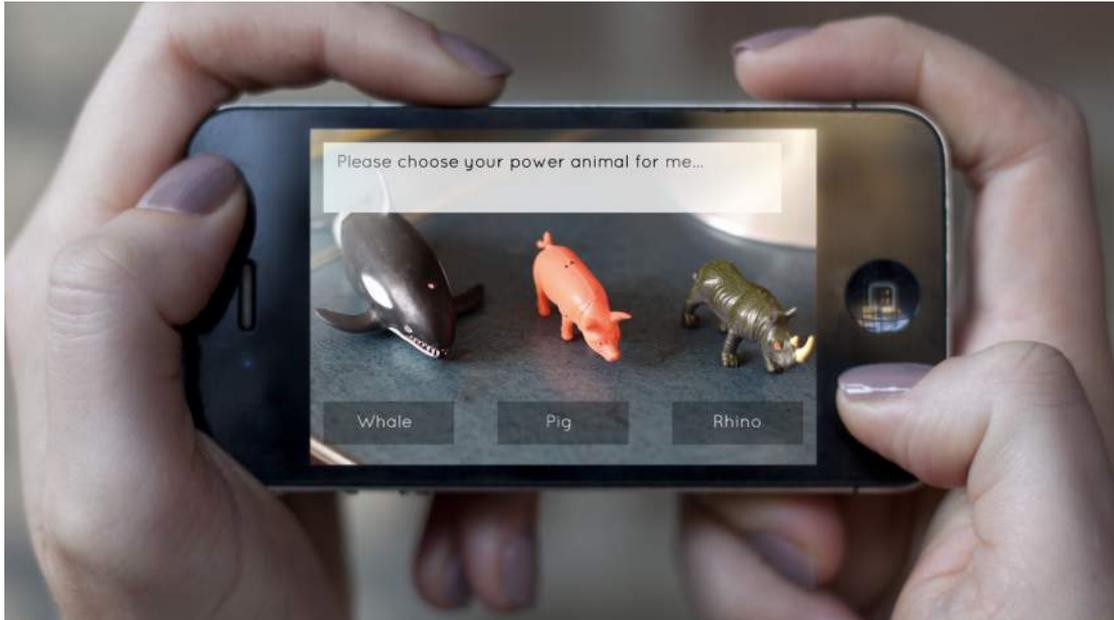
- Copy the shortlink for another campaign and put it into your web browser followed by the + sign to display bit.ly page analytics. This will show you which websites drove the most traffic to that link.
- Install the Google Image Search plug-in on Chrome and use it to search by image: copy an image from a successful campaign and drag it into your search bar to reveal which websites have also used that image. This is also a good way to find out who has written about your own campaign (we were surprised to find Karen in a Spanish lifestyle magazine).

We drew up a list of target publications based on our initial positioning research (where we worked out who our ‘tribes’ and ‘sub-tribes’ were) and the above research. Think about the type of publications your target audience might read and don’t forget to include blogs.



Use existing press contacts where possible. If you don’t have existing contacts at your target publications, see if anyone in your network does.

When you approach publications, use a very brief (one-paragraph) ‘elevator pitch’ in your cover email to grab their attention, and tailor it to the publication and/or journalist. Make it personal and genuine – for instance, if you’re a big fan of the publication, say so in your email.



Journalists like it when you make their life as easy as possible, so give them all the information they need in an easy format. We put some selected *Karen* press images on our Flickr page that journalists could download in different sizes and formats – you could do the same via Dropbox or your own website.

## POST-CAMPAIGN

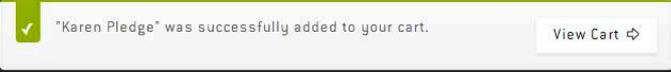
You've made it, boom! Time to crack open the cava and put your feet up. Well, for half an hour maybe – after that, you'll have to gather backer information, write backer updates and thank you messages, order your rewards, buy bubble wrap, go to the post office...

To break things down in a slightly more ordered fashion, here is what you need to think about after your campaign is finished:

- **Gathering information from your backers:** work out what you need to know from each person (shipping address, T-shirt size, what poster they want) and create a big tracker spreadsheet so you can order the right rewards and keep track of postage costs etc.
- Don't stop talking to your backers: plan your **project updates** between now and your launch. Tell them clearly when they can expect to receive their rewards, and remember it's better to under-promise and over-deliver than the other way round.
- **Order your rewards.** If you're ordering things like badges, bags and postcards, they will be cheaper in larger quantities – you could keep some to use for promotional purposes and save on production costs.
- Order your **packing materials** and clear some time for packing and posting. Have a packing party, with pizza. Don't forget to take pictures, or a video, to send to your backers.
- As soon as the *Karen* campaign finished, we received a message from someone asking if we were going to have a 'slacker backer' option. As the name suggests, this is a mechanism to **collect money for your project after the campaign closes**. We put a [£10 Karen pledge](#) in our online shop to receive the same benefits as Kickstarter backers at that level. Don't forget to put a link on your Kickstarter page before your campaign finishes, as you won't be able to edit your page after that.
- Give some thought to what you will do with these lovely new audience members, and how you can **convert them into lifelong supporters**. We put all our backers on our mailing list, and tagged them in our contact database so we can continue to engage with them well after the *Karen* project is complete.
- If you find that your project experiences **delays** and you can't deliver it when you said you were going to, be honest with your backers. They will probably understand and cut you some slack, as long as you communicate clearly what the problems are and what you are doing about them.

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# SHOP

 [View Cart ↔](#)

**Karen Pledge**  
£10.00



Buy a £10 Karen pledge and you will receive an early invitation to download the Karen app, as well as an exclusive report that reveals how Karen used data to personalise your experience. We will also add you to the app credits as a thank you.

**Cart**

Karen Pledge  
2 × £10.00



Subtotal: £20.00

[View Cart →](#) [Checkout →](#)

### If you haven't made it

If you've invested all this time and effort and you haven't reached your target, you'll no doubt be feeling despondent. Time to pour yourself a big glass of wine and regroup. But also take away the positives from the experience:

- **Crowdfunding is an excellent way to test something before you've invested in producing it.** That applies as much to your new sofa-cum-vacuum cleaner as your new production of 'Ann Widdecombe: The Musical'. If you ran a good campaign but your backers stayed away, take the learning from this to review and improve your project.
- If you're not put off crowdfunding for life, **you can try again:** there are many examples of campaigns that succeeded the second time round

# OUR CROWDFUNDING DO'S AND DON'TS

Having lived through the whole agonising, exhilarating and fascinating experience of crowdfunding, here are our top tips:

## FIVE BIG TIPS

- Invest in pre-campaign planning. Plan everything (I mean: everything), and start early.
- Spend a lot of time reviewing your contact database and putting people into groups.
- Reserve the first few days of your campaign for 'friendraising'.
- Use a personal approach when you ask your close contacts for support.
- Spend lots of time perfecting your rewards. Review them, then review them again.

## FIVE BIG MISTAKES

- Thinking that crowdfunding is where you sit back and watch the money roll in. It's hard work – and it may not be right for you.
- Making a 10-minute campaign video. Or, worse: not making a video.
- Asking people to 'donate' to your campaign. Put a jar in the office and stick 50p in it every time someone uses the d-word in relation to crowdfunding.
- Forgetting about the story. Your campaign should be about more than just the project you are funding.
- Bombarding people with requests for money. Don't get carried away: put yourself in their shoes and judge the volume of emails carefully.

## Follow us

That's it, pretty much! If you'd like to learn more about Blast Theory, why not visit our website: [www.blasttheory.co.uk](http://www.blasttheory.co.uk)

Or, to stay up to date with our latest news, follow us on Twitter: @blasttheory

## FURTHER READING

Here is a digest of links to articles and blogs we found useful:

Yancey Strickler's presentation for Creative Mornings in 2011 gives a brief overview of Kickstarter and highlights the features of a couple of successful campaigns.

This blog by Tim Ferriss sets out why the Soma Water campaign was so successful. We weren't keen on his suggestion to use 'virtual assistants' for everything, but there are some useful tips in there.

Kickstarter's Creator Questions take you through the basics of Kickstarter. Indiegogo's Playbook does the same for Indiegogo.

The Crowdfunding Hacks website by self-proclaimed 'crowdfunding sherpa' Clay Hebert

This article in Entrepreneur gives a handy overview of 10 top crowdfunding tips.

Nesta's crowdingin.com is a great website to help you decide which platform to use.

This blog post tells you more about the '30% magic rule.'

This Huffington Post article by Melinda Emerson contains more handy tips. Ignore the bit about social media advertising, though: you don't need to spend money on advertising to make your campaign a success.

This Gamasutra article by William Dubé gives an account of his Kickstarter campaign for indie game Jotun, including how he dealt with the dreaded mid-campaign 'slump'.

### **Thanks to the following people for their great crowdfunding advice and moral support:**

Clare Norburn, Fundraising Consultant, [norburnc@dircon.co.uk](mailto:norburnc@dircon.co.uk)

Victoria Ireland, Fundraising Consultant, [victoria@irelandassociates.co.uk](mailto:victoria@irelandassociates.co.uk)

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Laura Coleman, Director, ONCA Gallery

Missy Laney, Sundance Institute

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