

Kickstarter End Around



Denver's specialty sewn goods scene is thick with talk of Kickstarter. Everyone knows someone who is planning a project or finishing a campaign. I sat down with a couple of Kickstarter veterans to get a better idea of how the whole thing works.

Jake Winkler with Cozey? (cozey7.com), a local children's wear brand, describes a Kickstarter process full of business nuance and emotional connection. "It's a conversation basically. You surround yourself with people that are willing to accept your mistakes, and in return they get to go to the source and be there the very first time that something's been made." That explains the compact between the backers and the creatives.

He goes on to describe a process that is a very careful and intricate dance

between community and finance. "The goal you set can't be too high because you want to reach it as fast as you can. You mobilize your social network to have everyone hit the site on the first day the campaign starts." Apparently this causes the Kickstarter computer to assign your project certain positive metrics, which affects how anxious big money investors might view their risk. Speed counts, it turns out that hitting a \$15,000 goal in a few hours is far better for your project's algorithm than making several times that much money over a much longer period of time. Jake sums it up this way: "Crowdfunding is the check box before angel funding."

Another Colorado-based Kickstarter, Devin O'Neill points out the significance of a compelling video to a successful campaign. O'Neill pushed through a

Kickstarter campaign for Magzook (magzook.com), an ingenious magnetic belt, raising \$600,000 in six weeks – a day's work by any measure. When pressed about the seemingly large number of people willing to give up a ton of money for a belt he had never made, O'Neill points to the medium, "The video is the most important part; it has to be fast and it has to have a balance between who you are and what you are doing. You have to have a story and be authentic." Somewhere Marshall McLuhan is smiling.

Kickstarter is a new kind of product truth serum that is virtual and real at the same time. It combines warm human stories with cold mathematical equations to create a world hermetically sealed inside a single website. Products pass or fail based on everything except touch and feel. In the end,

when concepts are validated, participants wear their successful campaigns like badges of honor, a required life exam passed.

Talking with Jake and Devin it becomes clear that Kickstarter provides an environment where a startup business can step around all the traditional rules and hurdles to entering a market with a new product. There are no overworked buyers or retail displays. The website itself provides most of the necessary PR and marketing, as it is scanned and watched so carefully by the blogosphere looking for 'the next big thing'. Financing, of course, comes from the backers, at least at first, and that simple monetary democracy, i.e. voting with one's Visa card, is what fuels a company's dreams of rising into the big leagues. Kickstarter is how you get noticed. ●