

FINANCE

Join the Crowd: Goals, Funds, and Community

by Danielle Miguel



Crowdfunding platforms are often touted as a means of quickly raising money. But money isn't the only benefit -- backers can also provide a sense of community and an affirmation of the project's vision.

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You have a vision that can change the world: if not necessarily largescale, at least for the sake of whatever values and goals you hold dear to your heart. Clearly this vision is different for all types of people. For those of us interested in making their ideas tangible, a new tendency is to seek a community to support us in our endeavors. That's right, we look towards one another because we live in an age where teamwork is vital to making ideas happen. That's where crowdfunding comes in.

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According to Merriam-Webster, crowdfunding is “the practice of soliciting financial contributions from a large number of people.” You probably spend a lot of time on the internet if you’re reading this, and even then, you’ve probably seen such pages on your Facebook and LinkedIn newsfeeds where you’ll find people posting links to sites including GoFundMe or Kickstarter. These sites are the first steps to making their visions a reality, and in crowdfunding, understanding why these pages exist isn’t hard — nothing comes free in this world, and projects need support and resources. So people use the internet as a platform to advocate on behalf of their causes and projects, whether it be to fund their next graduate school trip, help Kanye West get out of his \$53 million dollar debt, or support a family member with expenses after an unforeseen medical emergency.

This way of swiftly generating monetary funds for one’s project or cause helps people such as entrepreneurs establish a sense of community with those who donate. At Northwestern University, three popular crowdfunding sites, Kickstarter, RocketHub, and IndieGoGo, were part of a study analyzing how crowdfunding works and what occurs for the party that is seeking donations for a project, and the parties that fund it. It was found that the seekers benefited in the sense that they managed to raise funds, cultivate a sense of community, and bring visibility to their businesses and causes. On the other hand, funders were able to participate in a community that they felt meaningful to them, and also sought rewards in the process of participating. The intersection of this online platform is the overlap in a common goal or vision, the affirmation of the idea through donations, and the community that is built off of that investment.

Now, we see strength in numbers. Crowdfunding is not only a viable source of sustenance for ideas yet to come, but also a means of promoting social impact within larger global communities connected via the internet. Crowdfunding is a platform for movement and proactivity, and it fosters the entrepreneurs within us. With that, I urge you to check it out some time and see what you may find!



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Danielle Miguel is a graduate of the University of California, Berkeley, where she studied Public Health, Public Policy, and Political Economy.