

## CROWDFUND IT!

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ing to the experts. That includes people who need money for legitimate things, like expensive medical procedures or a life disrupted by fire. Meanwhile, less substantial crowdfunding projects can hit it out of the ballpark — like the Ohio man who set off to raise \$10 to make a potato salad and ended up raising \$55,000.

“He was basically making a mockery of it,” Brubaker says. “It ended up going viral. He ended up on the ‘Today Show’, ‘Good Morning America’.”

Wait, why are we letting this Brubaker character run off at the mouth?

Oh, right. Because this Lewiston author managed to raise more than \$33,000 in 30 days for his effort to adapt his book “Seeds of Success” to film. Brubaker’s Kickstarter campaign was such a smashing success, now authors and others in need of money are taking a close look at his winning formula. Was it simple luck that made Brubaker’s project such a success? Was it just a matter of fluke timing, or of being in the right place at the right time?

“I don’t think there’s any luck involved at all,” Brubaker said.

No, Brubaker succeeded, according to those who make a career out of fundraising, because he came in with a plan. He did his homework, he surrounded himself with talented people and he poured his own hard-earned dough into the project — between 10 and 20 percent of his goal — long before asking anyone else to do so.

That and he worked his derriere off.

“You’ve got to do your homework and your research,” Brubaker says. “You have to treat a crowdfunding campaign like it’s a full-time job, because it really is.”

## 4 out of 100 donate

In his Kickstarter campaign, Brubaker surpassed his goal of \$30,000 in less than a month, ending up with \$33,517 in contributions. With that achieved, the process is now underway to transform “Seeds of Success” into a film.

The fictional story of a man on a quest to become a better coach, teacher and person, the manuscript is now in the hands of a Hollywood script writer who will begin to prepare it for the big screen, while the rest of the team gets about securing corporate sponsorships for the film.

With all that going on, there are those who consider Brubaker a fundraising guru. Brubaker somewhat disagrees: If there is such a thing as a crowdfunding guru, he says, it is Jodie Bentley, an actress, producer and marketing coach now based in Los Angeles. Bentley literally wrote the book on crowdfunding. For those hoping that simple luck or the kindness of the universe will carry them through a funding campaign, Bentley’s view is as grim as Brubaker’s.

“There’s a lot of work that goes in at the beginning. A lot of people don’t do that,” she says. “Only about 4 percent of the people you ask are actually going to donate.”

Four percent. That’s four out of every 100 people you ask. Whether it’s for your ski trip to Switzerland or a heart transplant. The rest will either promise money that is never produced or they’ll just laugh in your face.

How to overcome these staggering odds? Both of these gurus agree the first step involves surrounding yourself with people who are smarter than you.

“What we learned, and what most people don’t do in fundraising, is you must build a team,” Bentley says. “Crowdfunding is not a go-it-alone business.” Brubaker did just that, researching other campaigns, hiring pros to help him get the message out there the way he wanted, and bringing aboard talent by offering incentives. (See related story on Brubaker’s team-building success.)

The campaign itself is critical, and experts say it must start big — you should shoot for raising 25 percent of your goal in the first 36 hours.

Brubaker and his team went so far as to host launch parties, first in Portland, then in New York and Philadelphia.

“I think that’s what got us over that hump initially,” Brubaker says. “Taking our show on the road, getting people excited and kind of beating our own drum. You can’t do it all online. There’s a lot of skepticism on the In-

## THE COST OF FUNDRAISING

There are costs associated with crowdfunding in addition to whatever is spent putting your campaign together. Many crowdfunding websites charge a percentage of what is raised, and also charge fees for donations made by credit card, Paypal, etc.

Here are the fee statements made by three of the more popular crowdfunding websites. Look at each website for full details.

**Kickstarter:** If your project is successfully funded, the following fees will be collected from your funding total: Kickstarter’s 5% fee, and payment processing fees (between 3% and 5%). If funding isn’t successful, there are no fees. Source: Kickstarter.com

**GoFundMe:** While it’s free to create and share your online fundraising campaign, GoFundMe will deduct a 5% fee from each donation that you receive. Since our fee is deducted automatically, you’ll never need to worry about being billed or owing us any money. Source: GoFundMe.com

**Indiegogo:** It is free to sign up, to create a campaign and to contribute to a campaign. When your campaign raises funds, Indiegogo charges a 5% fee on the funds you raise. Source: support.indiegogo.com

ternet. People want to see the whites of your eyes. They want to know that their money is going to be put to good use. You can’t underestimate the importance of face-to-face.” (See related story on Brubaker’s fast start.)

## From tango lessons to a sick child

Technically, crowdfunding has been around for hundreds of years. It’s just never been so easy, to the point where pretty much anybody can create an appeal in a matter of minutes with a computer or smartphone.

Modern crowdfunding goes back to the early 2000s, with more and more online platforms being created as the first decade ended. While entrepreneurs, companies and large groups were often the most frequent participants, more and more individuals have gotten onboard. The causes are infinite.

Complete strangers have been known to raise a defense fund for cops involved in shootings. Others have tried to raise money in support of a guy in Kentucky who shot down a drone he caught spying on his daughter. (GoFundMe, for reasons that aren’t clear, would not allow campaigns to be launched in defense of the drone shooter, according to Brubaker. He knows this from personal experience: He tried to start one.)

Regardless of experts’ advice on the best ways to mount a crowdfunding campaign, thousands of new campaigns pop up all the time on sites like Kickstarter, GoFundMe and Indiegogo. (There are costs associated with crowdfunding websites, which often take a percentage of the money raised. Check each website for details. See related info box.)

Here’s a fast look at what’s out there just locally on GoFundMe:

- A Lewiston man trying to raise money for his soldier son, who became partially disabled while serving in Iraq. The goal was \$10,000 to help the soldier’s family. In four days, more than \$2,000 had been donated.
- A Sabattus man trying to raise \$10,000 to bury his father. After four days, \$1,875 was given.

- A Hebron woman trying to raise \$20,000 for a sick child. After six days, the campaign had nearly reached its goal — \$19,965 had been donated.

- In Lewiston, a co-ed softball team trying to muster \$6,500 to travel to a tournament in Orlando. After a month, \$1,470 had been raised.

- A Portland-based progressive rock band trying to raise \$5,000 to go on tour. After a week, they were about halfway there.

- A Windham man trying to raise \$600 for tango lessons. In one month, donors had contributed \$500.

The frivolity of some campaigns understandably bothers those who have serious financial needs.

“If they just want a trip to wherever, I see that as BS,” said a Lewiston woman named Paulette who responded to a crowdfunding query. “It kills me that people are out there raising money for trips and for fun things. Put some money aside and save up for it yourself.”

As it turns out, Paulette has a brother with cancer and a sister-in-law tagged with some hefty medical bills.

“She just has no idea how she’s going to pay any of these bills,” Paulette says. “It’s well over \$100,000. She’s going to have to use all the money she has. I wish to God I had the money to help her. Unfortunately, my husband and I are living on Social Security. We don’t have the money, either.”

## Focus, focus, focus

Brubaker sympathizes with those who feel compelled to rush things. But his prognosis for hastily prepared or frivolous campaigns — the potato salad campaign experience being the exception — is not good at all.

The differences between the big and flashy campaigns, like Brubaker’s, and the more down-to-earth efforts are obvious. If you’re working on an artistic endeavor, there is time to plan, to gather a team and to get all the details just right. If you suddenly need money because your house burned down or your son was hurt in a car wreck, circumstances won’t likely allow for that level of effort. So, what can be done if you have to — or just want to — slap a campaign together in haste?

Brubaker’s advice: Don’t do it. A thrown-together campaign will look shoddy, and to many people that will raise questions about its legitimacy, he said.

That said, clearly, based on just the GoFundMe activity locally, people are donating to campaigns that run the gamut of need and production quality.

“If you absolutely have to slap it together,” Brubaker continues, “I think you focus on that one person. You tell the story.”

Remember that powerful SPCA commercial that so troubled you? It featured singer Sarah McLachlan posing with abused dogs and cats while sad music played in the background. As Brubaker points out, the commercial never shows groups of dogs or packs of cats. It focuses on a single animal at a time, and there’s a reason for that. Show an average person a big group of suffering animals — or suffering kids, for that matter — and that person will be overwhelmed: There’s just no way he or she can help all of them.

“I can’t help a thousand dogs at the shelter,” Brubaker says. “I’m only one person.”

Show them one emaciated dog or one malnourished cat, however, and the effect on human empathy is powerful. It’s just one, after all. Maybe you really CAN make a difference with a donation. And the same applies to a simple crowdfunding campaign, Brubaker says.

If you need to raise money to help your ailing grandma, make your campaign all about her. Focus on her life, her woes and her needs. If a stranger on the web feels like his donation might help, he’s more likely to drag out his checkbook or reach for the phone.

It also helps, Brubaker says, to choose your platform wisely. Kickstarter is often used for long-range projects like his book-to-film endeavor. Indiegogo seems geared toward musicians and other independent artists. And GoFundMe commonly serves as a repository for emergencies and tragedies that befall us, with a few Little League teams in need of walking-around money thrown into the mix. If your favorite aunt needs a few thousand dollars for a prosthetic leg, in other words, you’ll likely have more luck on GoFundMe than Indiegogo.

## How Brubaker built a winning team

John Brubaker built his team carefully. He hired Colby Michaud, owner of Praxis Production Studios in Lewiston, to create a video for the campaign. He hired someone to craft a messaging game plan, and someone else to design a landing page.

He researched other campaigns — 10 that had succeeded and 10 that had failed. He mobilized his base: friends, readers, colleagues . . . not to mention people like California-based marketing expert Jodie Bentley, who already had experience in running successful campaigns.

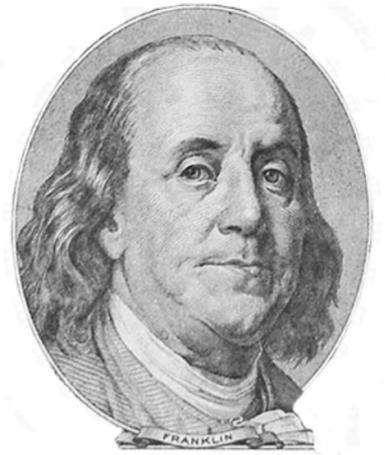
“You’re tapping into the minds of experts who have been there, done that,” Brubaker says, “who have already gone where you’re going.”

He drew people into his project, not by appealing to their generosity, but by offering incentives.

“Offer them an opportunity to get on board in a way that would be fun for them,” Brubaker says. “Maybe they can be in the film. Who wouldn’t want to do that?”

It’s a method the experts consider crucial to the process. Whether you’re asking someone to help with your campaign or outright begging them for money, it’s important to remember the question that rules just about everything: What’s in it for me?

“How am I going to get people who want to work on my project?” says Bentley. “Well, you have to find a win-win. There’s got to be a win in it for everybody.”



## BRUBAKER

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film project on Kickstarter when our campaign started, just because we mobilized our base. We gave them that ‘What’s in it for me.’ We gave people a good reason to get on board.”

Brubaker continues: “But we also explained to them that we needed their help right away, not a week for now. We want to be trending. What that does, when you’re trending, random people that you don’t know are going to see your project. If it looks compelling and there’s quality video, they’re going to click on it. Get them to click on your video and that should give them a reason to want to get on board.”

“If you have momentum,” Brubaker says, “anything can happen.”

His project reached its 25 percent mark within 36 hours and it just grew from there. Complete strangers came to his Kickstarter page, liked what they saw and donated, including one man who was compelled to contribute a sizable chunk because of the faith-based nature of Brubaker’s work.

“He felt like he was called upon by God to contribute,” Brubaker says, “and he contributed a large amount of money.”

## GOAT CHEESE

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ing to John, reference maternal lineage. For example, says John, “Tourista’s mother was Theresa, who came from Elsa...”

And Penny notes that although the goats “are very sweet and sociable, they’re livestock, not pets.”

For many years, the Duncans managed a herd of 50 goats before cutting back. Currently, says Penny, “we’re getting more production out of fewer goats.” York Hill Farm now produces five tons of cheese every year from three dozen goats.

Initially, they created a cheese-making operation in a spare room within their home. Then, as the operation grew, a new “animal barn” was constructed in 1986, allowing for conversion of the existing barn into a cheese factory, and moving production out of the house.

What are the secrets to award-winning cheese?

“Well fed and content goats produce the best cheese,” says Penny.

John adds that “well fed” has not only meant hay, grain and pasture grass, but also “our best shrubbery, apple trees and blueberry bushes,” which is why a good fence is an essential element in raising goats.

“We’ve cleared a lot of land with them,” he says with a smile.

In addition, the goats are fed whey, a byproduct of the cheese-



Penny Duncan cuts a ripened chevre roll in the cheese room at York Hill Farm.

making process.

Other factors in making good cheese include “attention to time and temperature in the cheese-making process, and cleanliness, cleanliness, cleanliness!” says Penny.

Back in 1987, challenged by the prospect of milking 25 goats by hand, they purchased a milking machine and other equipment that made the process more efficient and cleaner, and allowed them to sell to markets in Boston and New York.

With automation, York Hill Farm can milk three goats at

once in a short period of time, all the while feeding six, including the three being milked. Over the course of two milkings a day, each goat produces approximately 1 gallon of milk.

York Hill Farm produces a number of goat cheeses including: chevre roll with black peppercorns and garlic; chevre roll with green peppercorns and nutmeg; chevre roll with dill and garlic; ripened chevre roll with ash; fresh chevre in cups; fresh chevre with herbs and garlic in cups; and Capriano hard, aged cheese. “All of our cheeses have won prizes over the years,”

says Penny, referring to the American Cheese Society’s annual competition, which travels around the nation each year.

“In 1987, the black peppercorn roll with garlic won, and in 1996 our ripened cheese won in Madison, Wisc.,” says John.

In 2007, it was York Hill Farm’s green peppercorn and nutmeg roll’s turn to bring home top honors in the category of cheeses flavored with crushed or whole peppercorns or savory spices, and in that same year the dill and garlic entry and the black peppercorn entry each took second places.

In 2013, their aged goat cheese earned third-place honors in the farmstead aged over 60 days category.

And this year the farm’s ripened chevre rolled with vegetable ash earned first-place honors in the soft ripened goat cheese category.

“Vegetable ash,” Penny explains, “is purified charcoal.” It acts to neutralize the surface acids of the cheese, “which helps to form the nice white bloomy rind. Historically,” she adds, “it was made from cuttings taken from grape vineyards.”

It takes about three hours to process the cheese. After setting overnight, the milk turns to cheese curd. “Then,” explains John, “it’s scooped into cheese cloth and hung to drain.”

The whey, the liquid byproduct that drains from the hanging

cheese, is saved for consumption by the goats. The curd is then processed one last time into rolls and cups to be sold. It takes two to three days for fresh cheese to be ready for market.

The curd itself “doesn’t have a lot of flavor,” says John. However, as it ages, “it develops a more complex flavor.” A ripened cheese is one that sits for at least three weeks.

The butterfat in goats milk is higher earlier in the season (soon after the kids are born) and later in the season (when the milk is nearly gone). Because the milk’s qualities vary depending on time of year, certain cheeses are only available at certain times of year. The ripened chevre, for example, will be available again in early October.

York Hill Farm sells cheese from the shop at the farm, as well as online, at several locations in Belgrade and Farmington, at farmers markets, to restaurants and at other locations.

“Years ago,” says Penny, “you could not sell goat cheese in Maine, so it had to go to Boston or New York City. ... The last 10 years, the local thing has gone nuts!”

In addition to goats, the Duncans have also raised sheep, chickens and “a beef critter” from time to time. Up until “last fall,” says John, “we still had beef critters.” They also grow their own vegetables. “Penny can grow anything,” John adds, with obvious pride.