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New Crowdfunding Trend Expands in Lamorinda

By Sophie Braccini



Dana Ostomel and Diana Obrand fine tune the MEF crowdfunding campaign. Photo Sophie Braccini

to raise \$10,000 - only a fraction of the \$2.2 million the foundation is seeking to raise this school year.

Deposit a Gift has handled all kinds of fundraising projects, from the Katrina relief effort to helping parents of premature babies, and Ostomel often gets comments from people regarding the marketing efforts they have to make to be successful. "One of the preemies' grandmothers told me she felt this is like a job; she has to think about when to post on Facebook, when to send emails, and at what frequency," says Ostomel, whose company has been working in the fundraising field for four years. She recommends contacting people two to three times the first week via email and posting updates on social media.

"A gift is a possibility, but it is not mandatory. What is important to any fundraising project is to have a compelling story that is well told, and to think about the marketing campaign before the launch," Ostomel says. "People have to feel that they are part of the story, part of the journey." She also recommends circulating the site to the inner circle of supporters before the launch so the campaign does not start with a zero balance. "Giving begets giving," she adds.

A local campaign that finished with a bang and far surpassed its target was Acalanes High School junior Will Goldie's Eagle Scout project that sent computers to Afghanistan in partnership with Trust in Education and Raspberry Pi, the computer manufacturer.

The young man's success can be attributed to the multiple partnerships he set in place, with each group echoing his marketing efforts. "For my Eagle Scout project I wanted to work with the Raspberry Pi computers," says Goldie. "They have a neat concept for a computer - a simple small box that you connect to the keyboard, the screen, the memory, the drives and everything else you need. I also wanted to work with Trust in Education and saw a perfect opportunity to raise money, develop the software, buy all the components, assemble the computers and send them to the Afghan school Bud (McKenzie) is supporting."

The group, which had an initial goal of \$2,500, raised \$10,000 through an Indiegogo.com platform. The Raspberry Pi Foundation doubled the gift. Goldie has started shipping the computers and is using the additional money to build more units and improve the network access within the Afghan school.

Crowdfunding is also being used locally to launch business ventures. Orinda mom Stephanie Tomasco recently began using the crowdfunding platform Kickstarter to gain backers for her new business, Be Real Food, which produces kid-friendly, healthy, gluten-free bars. Because gluten sensitivity runs in her family, and because she wanted to control the amount of sugar her daughter was getting every day, Tomasco decided to create a bar that most kids would love, but that would incorporate only quality ingredients she wanted for her daughter. After she enrolled neighborhood kids to taste different formulas and decided what was appealing to young palates, she began to look for additional funds to ramp up her production. She lined up a co-packer to handle the production, a broker to put the bar in stores, and is using crowdfunding to gain backers for the product. "The idea is that people invest a certain amount of money with us and we will send bars to our backers in January as a thank you," explained Tomasco. So far, she has raised over half of her \$20,000 goal; her campaign will run until Dec. 21 and can be found at <http://kck.st/HRbmKk>.

The MEF crowdfunding campaign will run until the end of the year, it can be accessed at <http://mefgiftofeducation.mydagsite.com>. Goldie has set up a site to update his supporters at <http://educationpi>.

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