

QUESTIONS FOR LISA ELMALEH: CROWDFUNDING AND INDIVIDUAL FUNDRAISING



Lisa Elmaleh's Artist Website:

www.lisaemaleh.com

Webpage of Lisa Elmaleh's successful 2010 Kickstarter Campaign:

<http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/lisaemaleh/the-everglades?ref=live>

Raised: \$6,089.00

Goal: \$5,000.00

Crowdfunding has become an increasingly common and successful platform for artists to fundraise from individuals. In 2012, LMCC asked two NYC-based artists questions on their opinions and experience using crowdfunding platforms including Kickstarter and IndieGogo to raise funds to support their artistic projects.

1. Briefly describe your work and professional background as an artist.

I am a photographer who has been working on two projects: one photographing the landscape of the Everglades, and one photographing musicians in Appalachia. I work primarily in the wet plate collodion process, a hand-coated photographic process that requires an on-site darkroom, which I have built in the back of my pickup truck. I have been a recipient of the Aaron Siskind Foundation IPF Grant, The Everglades National Park Artist Residency, the Goldwell Artist Residency, the Camera Club of New York Darkroom Residency, and the Tierney Fellowship. I teach at the School of Visual Arts and the Center for Alternative Photography.

2. When and how did you start using crowdfunding platforms? How did you select the platform you ultimately used? Had you carried out an individual fundraising campaign in the past, either online or by other means? Did you have any reservations about crowdfunding?

I had seen a few projects on Kickstarter, and I really liked the way the website was set up. I was having difficulty finding funding for the materials and travel I would need for a month-long residency in the Everglades, and ultimately selected Kickstarter for three reasons: one, it seemed like a feasible and fair way to make the money that I needed; two, because it seemed like a worthy challenge to have to put together a short movie about the project; and three, because I knew that Kickstarter projects were getting publicity just from being on Kickstarter, so I thought it would put more eyes on my project that would not have otherwise

seen it. I have applied for many grants in my artistic career, but I had never carried out a self-perpetuated fundraising campaign quite like that before. I did feel reserved about asking friends and family, who are mostly in the same economic situation as I, for support. I still feel a bit unsure about this aspect of Kickstarter.

3. Please describe your process of planning the crowdfunding campaign, including timing, outreach methods, strategies to reach your goal, etc. What were the most challenging aspects?

The biggest challenge for me was figuring out how to make a video. I knew from doing research that the video was an essential part to a successful Kickstarter campaign. I wrote and rewrote my script again and again. Then, I made a very skeletal schedule and plan – but I think that, with the experience I have gained, I might have been a little bit more precise about sending scheduled e-mail blasts and such. I also think I would have done a bit more outreach to organizations in the photographic community to help publicize the effort. The most challenging aspect to me was sending out the e-mail blasts – a practice that I do not like in any way. A precise schedule would have helped to push me to send out reminders.

4. Briefly describe the size and characteristics of network you reached out to (ie friends, colleagues, past supporters, new contacts), and how often during the campaign.

I don't really have much of an e-mail list – I think I sent the first Kickstarter e-mail out to about two hundred people. I did use Facebook quite a bit. I also was approached by a local photo lab, called Gotham Imaging, who wanted to fund me – they did a dollar for dollar matching period during the second to last week of my campaign, as well as printed a few of my backer rewards, which was an enormous help – I could never thank them enough for all they did for me. They also put my Kickstarter project on their e-mail blasts, which drummed up more supporters.

5. Why do you think it was successful? Were there any lessons learned or things you would do differently on your next campaign?

I'm not sure if I know why it was successful – I worked really hard on my video, and I think that was a big part of it.

On my next campaign, I think I would be better about publicity. I would put much more effort into that aspect of the campaign. I would also start to make my backer rewards while the campaign was going on.

6. Did you learn anything new about your donors as a result of your recent crowdfunding campaign?

I have actually met a few new and exciting people who supported my Kickstarter project. They have been watching my work progress since the campaign, and are really excited and supportive of my work. This was definitely an unexpected perk of the campaign.