

BRIGHT IDEAS

Site funds projects one backer at a time

Did you ever want to get in on the ground floor of the next big thing? Imagine if you had provided some of the seed money for the iPhone or Google or "Avatar." Imagine how smart you'd feel now that they've all made a bajillion dollars.

Now, thanks to **Kickstarter.com**, you won't miss the opportunity to bankroll the next world-changing invention or blockbuster movie.

The website bills itself as "a new way to fund and follow creativity."



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InSites

People post proposals for projects they want to pursue. They give a little sales pitch and list how much money they need to complete their project. Visitors to the site can pledge money to support projects

they deem worthy. If a project raises its target amount, it gets funded.

An eclectic mix of ideas

The proposals cover a wide range of topics. As I write this, the Kickstarter home page features pitches for a font design, a music video, a country music album, a play, an earth-banked meat aging room and more. The listed categories on the site cover visual and performing arts, food, fashion, games and technology, with subcategories for many of the broader fields.

There are several ways to browse through the projects. The home page has featured projects that change on a regular basis. A search field on the page will let you look for specific subjects. There's a Discover tab at the top of the page that takes you to a page with a list of all the categories. Clicking on a category

takes you to a page with related projects. They are organized into Staff Picks, Popular This Week, Recently Successful and Most Funded.

In addition to the categories, there are lists of featured projects, and projects by city. These lists are broken down further into categories such as Staff Picks, Popular, Recently Launched, etc.

One of the more interesting categories under Featured is Curated Pages. These are projects picked by institutions, such as the Rhode Island School of Design, Life.com, YouTube, and many others, that reflect the interests of the curator.

All or nothing

A project is given a limited amount of time — up to 60 days — to reach its funding goal. If it doesn't raise enough money in the allotted time, it gets pulled from the site and no money changes hands. This gives project creators time to see if there's enough interest in their idea to finance it.

Each project has a promo on the site consisting of its name, a picture, a brief description, the number of days left to fund it and the amount of money pledged to date.

Clicking on the promo takes you to the pitch page for the project. A video appeal from the project's creator is the dominant element on these pages. I was impressed with the quality of all the videos I watched on the site. It seems the majority of comments, photos or videos that people post on sites such

as Facebook or YouTube is pointless, and of poor quality. It was refreshing to see well-thought-out and nicely crafted videos (I didn't watch them all, so there may be some stinkers).

There's also a written pitch, accompanied by project images. Again, the ones I reviewed were well written with good quality imagery. Next to the pitch is data on the number of backers, the amount of money pledged, the goal and how many days are left to pledge. Beneath the data are descriptions of the rewards backers will get depending on how much they pledge. At the bottom is a biography of the project creator. Tabs at the top of the page lead to updates, backer bios and comments.

Just for the fun of it

The majority of the content on Kickstarter is the project pitches, but there also are a few supporting elements on the site. A Start Your Project tab at the top of the site enables creators to begin the process of getting a project posted. A blog link lets you follow project discussions. And a help link takes you to lots of useful information about developing a project, refining the pitch and the site's rules.

Kickstarter is very well done, with a clean design and simple navigation. It's fun to spend time browsing the site checking out the projects. The only downside is backers don't get to share in the profits of a successful project. So if you do fund the next big thing, all you get is bragging rights and maybe a T-shirt.

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