

No Crowd Funding for golf-gaming

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You may remember an article I posted in December about the use of crowd-funding to assist with the R&D costs in building a novel ultrasonic instrument to help golfers with golf-gaming? This is an up-date to let you know that the crowd-funding appeal was unsuccessful – spectacularly! If you want to know why then read on ...

Just a reminder about the aims of the appeal and then I'll tell you what went wrong.

The vision of the product to be developed was/is: to allow golfers to play on-line golf-gaming by hitting real golf balls using real golf clubs with the same strokes they would use on a real golf course but without needing to be on a golf course or a driving range. Indeed, this vision of golf-gaming could even be played indoors - at home or at work or almost anywhere. An ultrasonic unit would monitor the golf ball; it would be small and portable and placed near the ball on the ground. Ultrasonic waves would be used to measure the trajectory of the ball over the first 1 m of its flight. Gaming software then takes-over and predicts the full trajectory of the ball and where it lands on the golf course.

What went wrong with the crowd-funding campaign? I calculated that a minimum of £ 120 k would be needed for the development and that was set as the target of the crowd-funding appeal on the KickStarter web-site. KickStarter has a policy that an appeal must raise all of the target or none of the pledges are turned into cash for the organization appealing. The appeal had pledges of £ 850 by the date the appeal ended. Pretty bad, I know. KickStarter recommends to get the ball rolling by asking friends and family to make pledges and that is what made-up most of the £ 850. What was missing was all the golfers who browse KickStarter must have failed to find the pages about my campaign and I failed to bring any of the estimated 100 M golfers in the World to the KickStarter pages.

In a little more detail, what went wrong was that the average pledge on KickStarter is apparently \$ 25. A quick calculation shows that about 5,000 persons have to make the average pledge to raise £ 120 k. Having browsed the KickStarter web-site myself, I found it was not easy to find campaigns of interest among the thousands on the site using the search function. That is problem number one. I don't know how many people browse the KickStarter web-site each day but I guess few reached my campaign pages.

I joined several golfing forums on-line, such as: forum.mygolf, thesandtrap, golfforum and honestgolfers to place an article in appropriate sections but the moderators of the sites rejected my messages as spam. I was unable to contact any of the golfers I had hoped through golf forums. However, looking at the number of readers of the forums sections relating to golf-gaming I realized that the number of readers was relatively small anyway, between about 10 and 100 for each site so even if the moderators had approved my articles it is unlikely that 5,000 pledges would have been made.

An unexpectedly large response to my campaign came from persons who promised to use social media to promote it on my behalf – for an unspecified fee. I didn't take-up any of their offers. I am deeply skeptical about the ethical basis of some social media sites. Sadly, I sense that LinkedIn is heading in the same direction.

Another problem was that the moderator of campaigns at KickStarter caused a delay to the start of the campaign by objecting to my kind of R&D project. I was told that KickStarters find this kind of campaign "particularly seductive" and it needs to be clear what the risk is in this kind of R&D campaign (it's an issue linked to the rewards offered in campaigns). I thought I had made it clear but added a few extra words - then it was accepted. This caused a delay of one week – rather serious because the campaign was only 4 weeks long initially (once the end date is chosen it is impossible to change).

Having looked at many campaigns on KickStarter and other crowd-funding sites, I find that the original philanthropic intention of crowd-funding has disappeared in favour of simple sales promotion of finished products (albeit newly finished products). I read a few forum messages and observed that some contributors to KickStarter campaigns may have been stung in the past by R&D projects that took the money but failed to deliver the goods; it made me wonder if it was genuinely true that KickStarters find R&D projects "particularly seductive".

Anyway, at Cambridge Ultrasonics we are continuing to develop a prototype at a slow speed in-house and I would like to express my personal thanks to any person on LinkedIn who read my first article and responded by making a pledge to help – many thanks indeed.