



Better Phrasing for Online Fundraising?

A new study investigates phrases that drive crowd-sourced giving.

Could attracting more donations on your website be as simple as plugging in a few key phrases? A new study of over 45,000 Kickstarter projects has identified certain phrases that are common to successfully funded projects as well as phrases that are associated with unsuccessful efforts. While the findings are certainly food for thought, you may want to bring a few grains of salt to this meal.



Entitled, "[The Language that Gets People to Give: Phrases that Predict Success on Kickstarter](#)," the study was conducted by Georgia Tech assistant professor Eric Gilbert and doctoral candidate Tanushree Mitra. Gilbert and Mitra wanted to find out why a project like the Pebble smartwatch raised more than \$10,000,000 (making it the most successfully funded project in Kickstarter's history), while Ninja Baseball, a PC game, raised only a third of its \$10,000 goal.

The team used specially designed software to "scrape" the text from thousands of Kickstarter projects launched as of June 2, 2012. After controlling for variables such as project duration, overall funding goal, and the use of video as part of the pitch, they found that of the more than 9 million unique phrases they captured, 20,391 had predictive qualities. Their study identifies the top 100 phrases found to correlate significantly with funded or unfunded projects.

March 2014

Better Phrasing for Online Fundraising?

A new study looks at crowd-sourced giving.

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Farewell, Corky Retson

A remembrance of a colleague and friend.



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On their own, these phrases may not appear to be particularly strong or weak. For example, the number one phrase associated with funded projects is "project will be." (Not exactly the magic words you were waiting for, right?) What makes this phrase powerful, the study says, is that it evokes the persuasion principle of "authority" (i.e., by reading that "the project will be produced by an award-winning team," you will be impressed by the expertise and professionalism behind the project and will be more likely to give.)

If you're wondering, "Isn't *award-winning team* the key phrase here?" rest assured that we're scratching our heads a bit, too. And as you go deeper into the list of phrases, it gets more confusing. There are some phrases in the funded category that appear very similar to those in the unfunded category: e.g., "their creative" appears to help attract donations, and yet "be creative" doesn't.

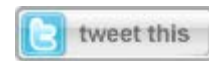
Perhaps most troubling of all is the fact that the study doesn't take into account the inherent appeal of the various Kickstarter projects themselves. Smartwatches appear to be the next big thing in wearable computing - Samsung has already rolled out its version and Apple is rumored to be close behind. Isn't it possible that the Pebble was successful because the project caught a huge wave of interest? And don't some projects fail because no matter how clever or compelling their pitches, there simply isn't a market for that product or service?

We sent this question via email to the study's co-creator, Tanushree Mitra. She wrote back: "A good extension of this study would be to actually interview backers to know why they backed a product." On that point, we offer a key phrase of our own: ya' think?

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free-range thinking is written by Andy Goodman and Celia Hoffman. To read back issues, download free publications, and to learn more about our work, please visit www.thegoodmancenter.com.

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Attending GEO's 2014 conference in LA? If so, please come to my short talk on March 11th.

Stories are the software of the brain, strongly influencing which facts we let in and which we choose to ignore. Changing how Americans think and behave often comes down to replacing one story with a new, more powerful version. At GEO's 2014 National Conference in Los Angeles, I'll be delivering a short talk on this topic entitled, "Master Narratives: The Stories that Move Americans."



I'll highlight specific storylines that run deeply through our culture - so deeply, in fact, that you may not even be consciously aware of them. Rest assured, however, that they are constantly shaping the debate on crucial issues, and any story you tell to advance your cause will be tested against them. So please join me on March 11th (10:15-10:40a) for this new look at storytelling.

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More Powerful Presentations, More Watchable Webinars

Learn how to have both in our online classes in March.

Do you have a sneaking suspicion that your presentations aren't everything they could be? (Maybe it's even more than a suspicion.) Join us online in March and learn:

- The five most commonly made mistakes in presenting
- The three qualities audiences want most
- Why the opening and closing segments are the most important
- How to make PowerPoint your friend and not your enemy



"Why Bad Presentations Happen to Good Causes" is a two-hour webinar scheduled on March 13th and 14th from 11a-12n Pacific (2-3p Eastern) each day. Tuition is \$250 per student and discounts are available for organizations that register three or more students. Get more details and register online [here](#).



When I first started attending webinars, I was probably just as bored as you. But as the host/teacher droned on, I started to notice a few things. Having worked in talk radio earlier in my career, I started to see distinct similarities between the webinar format and a talk radio show.

Later on, as I began developing webinars to teach at The Goodman Center, I incorporated some of the principles that have been proven to make talk radio engaging. As a result, our webinars receive consistently high marks, and good causes that frequently conduct webinars of their own have asked me to teach these techniques to them.

We've condensed those lessons into a one-hour class open to the public. In "The Webinar on Webinars," you'll learn:

- How to keep participants engaged from beginning to end
- The fine details of creating a good online experience
- How to use your two assets (voices and visuals) to maximum advantage
- What else we learned from talk radio that makes webinars even better

To learn more about "The Webinar on Webinars" and to register online for our March 21st class (11a-12n PT, 2-3p ET), click [here](#).

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Farewell, Corky Retson

A remembrance of a collaborator and friend.



He created the master design for the newsletter you're reading right now. He designed and shepherded through production every edition of "Storytelling as Best Practice." Over 15 years, we collaborated on many projects for my company as well as for clients, and I always enjoyed working with him - even when he would patiently listen to one of my design suggestions, look at me very calmly, and then say in a way that only he could, "No, we're not going to be doing *that*."

Corky Retson was a gifted graphic designer who used his talents to help many nonprofits here in Southern California. His passing at the age of 54 is a shock to all of us who knew him and a profound loss to the good causes he made better through his work. I will miss his wry sense of humor and will think of him often - his work is so much a part of our work.

Our thoughts are with his parents, siblings, and his husband, Scott, at this very sad time.

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