



“FANS FUND
OUR DREAM
CAREERS”



They get by with a little help from their fans: (from left) Kate, Gabby, Georgette and Ellie's careers are off to a flying start

Always wanted to make a record, shoot a film or set up your own design business, but haven't got the cash to do it? These enterprising young women got fans to help fund their new careers...

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“FANS HELPED ME MAKE A LORD OF THE RINGS PREQUEL”

Kate Madison, 31, from Cambridge, is a film-maker and actress. Kate's film, *Born of Hope*, an hour-long prequel to *The Lord of the Rings* films, was partly funded by online film fans

“I loved the *Lord of the Rings* movies and, after the final one came out in 2003, I found out about a Tolkien fan film competition being held at a convention in Toronto. I'd wanted to make a film for ages – I've been acting since I was four years old – and that inspired me to do it. But it wasn't as easy as just buying a camcorder! Getting experience working on other films, finding people who could work for free, as well as deciding on the script all took time.

I started filming in 2008 and had to give up my office temp job to do it full-time because I was both acting in and directing the film. There was definitely a point in the middle of filming where I thought, What the hell am I doing? I was trying to reserve accommodation for our crew and the booker was telling me I needed to give them £5,000 in the next hour or lose them and I simply didn't have the

“WE DECIDED TO PUT A TRAILER ON YOUTUBE, APPEALING FOR FANS TO DONATE MONEY”

money. I ended up in tears on the phone to a friend. I'd got so far by that point, and so many people were involved, that I couldn't turn back.

My life savings of £8,000 had already gone and I realised I was going to get into debt funding the rest of the film. That was when we decided to put a trailer on Youtube, appealing for fans to help and donate money. More than 400 people invested and we raised £17,000 so that we could finish the film. Crowdfunding works because getting small amounts of money from lots of people is more realistic than getting a big amount from a few investors. All the donors names were included and thanked in the end credits.

The best thing about making the film was the friendships I made. Actually, with so many people spending so much time together, there was a running joke that *Born of Hope* became not so much a film as a dating agency. Eight couples got together, one of which was me and Chris (the leading man). The life experiences that came with it were also great. We went to a convention in Germany, where we ended up standing on a stage next to *Twilight* actors – insane. It was never the intention to be famous, but I now have had the odd person writing to me saying, ‘I've never written to a celebrity before...’ and I'm thinking, I'm not a celebrity!

My advice to anyone wanting to make a film is that you should think about why you want to do it. I didn't make my film for profit, recognition or media attention; that just came with it. I wanted to make a film so I could say, ‘Yes, I did that!’ I'm very proud that people have enjoyed the film and it's led to a new, and more fulfilling, acting and producing career.”

● Visit www.bornofhope.com >



“WITHOUT THE FANS, I DON'T THINK I'D BE DOING MY DREAM JOB”

Gabby Young, 25, from Bath, is the lead singer of Gabby Young and Other Animals. Nearly 1,000 fans have supported the band by paying a fee to ‘become an animal’ on www.gabbyyoungandotheranimals.com

“When I was 22, I discovered I had thyroid cancer. I was told that I’d have to have an operation to remove my thyroid and there was a small chance of losing my voice, because the thyroid is so close to the vocal chords. To me, that was almost as bad as saying, ‘You could die from this’. Since discovering I could sing, at the age of 11, it was all I wanted to do, and I initially trained as an opera singer. After the operation, the first thing I did was test my voice. I remember shouting, ‘I can talk! I can talk!’ before passing out when the drugs wore off.

I believe everything happens for a reason. I had been living with my parents in Wiltshire and working as a secretary. Then this huge event took over and made me re-evaluate what I was doing with my life. While I was recuperating, I had time to think about my career and where it was going. I felt it was a good time to start from scratch – and that meant crowdfunding was essential because I didn’t have any money!

The first time it came in useful was when the band was invited to play at South by Southwest, a music festival in Texas. We didn’t have the money to get there so didn’t go, but it started us thinking how we could make money for funding things. We were at a crossroads – we’d had interest from big labels but didn’t want to go with them because it felt too much like signing your life away. We have an amazing fanbase, built up through MySpace, who I hoped would be

generous enough to help us out. We set up a section on our website where you could ‘become an animal’ (mole, bear or tiger) for £12.50, £25 or £65 and, in exchange, fans who signed up would get gig tickets, albums and merchandise. The more they spent, the more they got in return.

Thankfully, the fans really surprised us. We have a strong fanbase in London but I had no idea that there were people in Mexico and Brazil that wanted to help us out, too. We spent the first lot of money on PR and a music video, and the

“I KNEW WE HAD FANS IN LONDON, BUT I HAD NO IDEA PEOPLE IN MEXICO AND BRAZIL WOULD HELP US OUT”

money that’s coming in now will go to the next album. We invite fans to join us for rehearsals and give them access to behind-the-scenes stuff, too. As a result, there’s less of a barrier between band and audience, which is why we called our album *We Are All In This Together*. We don’t just see ourselves as a band anymore, we’re more of a collective!

Crowdfunding made me realise you don’t have to wait for opportunities to come to you. If you’re serious about what you want to do, set it out like a business plan; brainstorm, think about how you can do it and then make it happen. Too many creative people get stifled by big business, and crowdfunding can help you rebel against that. It’s exciting that people are thinking, I can do this my own way!” >

BE INSPIRED



“MY FANS ARE PAYING FOR MY NEW ALBUM”

Ellie Lawson (above), 28, from Croydon, is a singer/songwriter who's raising funds for her next album by asking fans to invest in her on www.slicethepie.com

“I knew my life was going to change when I got a phone call from a record company telling me they wanted me to go to LA to record an album. I was selling ad space for a magazine, and I immediately handed in my notice. I'd been working hard writing songs for seven years! So I moved to LA and spent a year making an album. Unfortunately, there was a merger going on at the record company, and the new people didn't seem to know how to market my music, so I was dropped. It was devastating, but I was determined not to let it stop me.

One of my songs featured in the Jennifer Lopez movie *Monster In Law* and I got booked for the *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*. I was asked to do a tour of Barnes & Noble bookshops around the US and sold around 20,000 copies of the album. But, after that, with no record deal, I had to return home.

Once back, I went to a music-industry event and met David, the chief executive officer at Slicethepie.com. It's a website where users get paid for submitting reviews and the top-rated stuff goes through to a stage where users can then invest. When musicians hit their £15,000 target they go off and record the album. Investors get copies of the album, exclusive access and a share of the returns for their money.

David came to see me at a gig and then put some of my songs up on the site. Within an hour, they were getting really good reviews and I realised there was a community of people who liked my music enough to want to invest in it.

I'd received over £2,000 of funding before I temporarily withdrew from the site. But I'm back on there now and when I've hit the target of £15,000, I'll use the money to record my next album. Investors will hear the album first, as they will get 'sneak previews' of the tracks while I'm in the studio and they'll get the complete album a week before release.

The music industry is not the easiest path to making money. You have to think of it as a business and be realistic. For me, it makes sense to have a community of people that love your music to invest in you. It's so much more personal. When I'm in the studio making an album, it means more knowing the people who'll hear it first believe in me.”

● For more information, visit www.ellielauson.com

Ellie is sponsored by *Quicksilver Women*

“I LOVE SEEING FANS WEARING MY DESIGNS”

Georgette Williams (below), 29, from London, is leading the designer-funding charts on Catwalkgenius.com.

She's the founder and designer of *Georgette W Couture*

“At first, designing clothes was just a way to pay the bills. I'd taken the first job I could get when I arrived in London. It was in a clothes boutique in Carnaby Street, where they sold the work of independent designers. Inspired by the other designers in there, I started making one-off pieces myself.

The boutique I worked in had the occasional fashion show and my boss suggested I make some clothes for one of them. That's when I produced my first collection, which included trouser suits, short suits, jackets and men's T-shirts and jeans. There were seven outfits, a combination of street and urban wear in an array of colours. I got a really good response and that encouraged me to concentrate on designing, so I taught myself to make the patterns and do the sewing, too.

I'd never heard of crowdfunding before I was approached by *Catwalk Genius*. The owner, Helen, had read about me on a fashion blog. She emailed to tell me that she was launching an online boutique and asked me to participate. She'd read about crowdfunding in the music industry and thought the idea could work in fashion, too. People who like my clothes can purchase shares in my next collection for £10 a share. If they buy five shares, they get a 10% discount when they buy clothes I've designed. When all the (5,000) shares have been sold, I make the collection and investors receive a third of the profits. My designs proved popular on the site and, when crowdfunding was introduced as an option, I was the designer that somebody bought a share in. Since then, I've become the most invested in designer on the site.

The financial constraints of a new business can be daunting, especially if it means you can't let your creativity flow because there's not enough money to do what you want to do. I love the idea of people believing in you, understanding where you're coming from and wanting to invest; it's fantastic. It's also a lot simpler than the process of writing proposals, pitching for investment and having to endure endless meetings. Lots of people are scared to do what they really want, but I say just go for it! Almost 250 people have now invested in me online – and I'm so happy they have!”

● For more information, visit www.georgiewcouture.com ■

