Crowdsourcing & citizen science transcript

There are times when you want to do a really cool project but you know that applying for conventional research funding isn't really an option. Have you ever considered crowdfunding it? You may have heard of Kickstarter (and similar funding platforms) where people set up cool projects, ask other people to fund it and then give rewards to those who committed money such as sneak peeks into the process, gifts and even a copy of the final product, whatever that might be.

Kickstarter has been really successful for a lot of projects with really big endeavours reaching 6 figure donation levels. But smaller projects looking to raise tiny pots of cash can also do well. An engineering student at Cornell University sought to raise $30,000 to send tiny Sprite craft into space. He raised over $70,000 in the end. Or conservationists who just needed $9000 to develop open source wildlife tracking collars. With some originality, a bit of excellent promotion and a whole lot of incentives, you can get a great Kickstarter campaign going that could really push forward a part of your work while also engaging a wide range of people in your research.

There are lots of crowdfunding models out there, including Patreon, which allows existing content creators to get funding to support existing outputs such as podcasts or YouTube series. This is especially useful for anyone who is already putting content out there as part of their outreach activities.

However, it isn't always money that helps a project happen. Sometimes researchers need bigger teams of people to analyse data and other research outputs that they simply don't have. While outreach and good teaching sessions with the public can be hugely beneficial, tapping into the phenomenon of citizen science is even better. In a nutshell, citizen science is research conducted by members of the public and not formal scientists (or other researchers). This has even been recognised as a concept by the European Commission in their Green Paper on the topic. Whichever way you view it, citizen science allows people to be involved, empowered and contribute to ongoing research, while researchers benefit from an engaged, motivated and enthusiastic body of volunteers.

Running a citizen science project on its own can be daunting which is why there are many websites out there that can help set things up and engage the public in your project. One especially popular site is Zooniverse. You can identify penguin species in Antarctica, look for comets in space, or even spot microscopic plankton. With inbuilt discussion boards, citizen scientists can communicate with lead researchers on a project and collaborate together to discover new species, planets and much, much more. Plus, you are educating and conducting outreach with people from around the world.

So what form of crowdsourcing or citizen science will you use in your next project? Until next time, bye!

Scripted by Georgina Cronin (2016)