# Kickstarter After Action Report

After a Kickstarter, I like to discuss what went well, what could have gone better, and what I learned. First, however, a caveat; I firmly believe in the cliché that (oftentimes) success is a \*terrible\* teacher. Certain things just ‘work’ and it’s always tempting to over attribute that success to one’s own efforts (when it very often has to do with capricious forces outside of one’s control). As such, take everything I write with a grain of salt (heh)- this is what \*I\* think worked and didn’t.

## Defining ‘Massive Success’ for J.M. Perkins

The Salt in Wounds Kickstarter was a massive success by my standards. In 24 hours, I’d raised more money than in my previous 16 years of writing. By the time the campaign was done, I’d raised more (gross) than my annual salary. I was comfortable doing the project for $5000 and my personal ‘great job’ benchmark was $20,000. The fact that we more than doubled that is incredible, daunting, and something for which I am so, so grateful for.

## Stat Breakdown

$20192 (or 34%) was pledged via Kickstarter $37515 was pledged via external.

The top ten referral sources for money (representing just shy of 80% of the funds raised) according to Kickstarter internal analytics were

Direct (19.93%) (Basically think ‘catchall’ that wasn’t sorted into a different category)

Reddit (15.75%)

Tabletop Games - Discover (8.74%)

Google (6.58%) and

Erfworld (5.83%)

Search (5.07%)

48 Hour Reminder email (4.83)

Facebook (4.56%)

Advanced Discover (4.29%)

Profile Starred (4.28%)

As far as where raw traffic was coming from, google analytics monitored 27346 sessions and the top five sources (which represents about 86% of the traffic directed to the site) were:

Direct (11953 sessions)

Reddit + Reddit mobile (4793 sessions)

Facebook + facebook mobile (3326 sessions)

Google (1942 Sessions)

Erfworld (1724 Sessions)

## What Did I do Well/What Went Well

**Massive pre-kickstarter campaign**: I think the thing that differentiates the Salt in Wounds Kickstarter from most gaming Kickstarters is that I’ve been publishing this material, for free, and promoting it for almost two years. In that time, I developed a readership in the 10s of thousands. I did interviews, actual plays, and more. I had a lot of people who were interested in the project and ready to share/promote it when the project launched. I even went so far as to turn down paying work in order to keep up with Salt in Wounds. My basic philosophy is that people need to see something 3 times before they’re willing to act on it (in this case, pledging for the Salt in Wounds Kickstarter) and I’ve to do the best job possible for people to have already ‘seen’ Salt in Wounds twice before they saw the Kickstarter (most especially, since I as a game designer have less name recognition than a lot of the awesome creators putting out stuff on KS)

**Elevator Pitch** Second, one of the things that made Salt in Wounds work (while other RPG setting and books didn’t fund/didn’t fund as well) is that Salt in Wounds has a core ‘elevator pitch’ that implies the unique gameplay that can be achieved with it. Story games and stand alone RPGs are good at this, people making expansionary material for 5e and Pathfinder don’t always have such a good command of this. Making a pitch of ‘this setting is just like what you’re familiar with - - but better!’ is a hard sell; tell me –in a sentence or two- what makes \*your\* work unique. I wrote an essay about this that I’m including in the ‘Design Notes’ book.

**(Sub)Reddit Fueled** Third, I’m extremely grateful my stuff was a hit with the the reddit rpg communities. They’ve been the primary vehicle for promoting my work and we the biggest single source of traffic and pledges. Other than that, I \*did\* promote well on twitter, facebook, and via traditional things like guest blogging, podcasts and more – but I bet big on reddit and it worked. It’s my belief that, though they aren’t perfect, the big reddit communities offers a creator their \*best\* chance to get quality work seen by the biggest numbers of people (as their algorithms seem to be the most ‘fair’ while note being as temporally spastic as twitter say).

**Erfworld for the Win!** Erfworld is a fantastic webcomic with a tremendous community (you should totally read it if you aren’t already). Rob (the author) generously giving access for Kickstarter promotion (it’s part of his ‘kicking it forward ethic) has been \*huge\* for both the Adequate Commoner (my last KS) and this one.

**Eye Catching Design** The Salt in Wounds Kickstarter campaign is not the most art heavy campaign I’ve seen, but I think I did a good job as art project manager and designer creating and setting up design elements that caught backers’ eyes, and communicated that the caliber of professionalism that will be put into the project. I’ve worked hard in the last year to develop some basic design skills & design sensisbility, and I think this paid off.

**Cool Rewards, Good Stretch Goals, and Good Pledge Level Design** I pretty much accomplished my goals for backer level designs; with people backing an average of over $50, I gave people a compelling reason to give me a bunch of money.

## Things I Could Improve On

**Mastering Advertising** I didn’t advertise Salt in Wounds at all. And while I don’t think a Kickstarter campaign built primarily on advertising is a good idea, getting it right can definitely add more than it takes away. There’s so many tools out there, that there \*are\* good options; like with most things, it’s finding that options that add value rather than annoy/detract. After this project, hopefully I have some capital to try some varying advertising strategies.

**Improving the Video** The project video is… not great (especially compared to the last video I did for Adequate Commoner). Scheduling more time to produce the video (and securing professional grade equipment and assistance) will be important for any future projects.

**Learning More About Analytics** Improving my understanding of analytics and tracking will help propel me into the larger leagues of publishers. As I mentioned above, \*most\* pledges and \*most traffic came ‘direct’ (aka Miscellaneous) so it’s nice to know that what I did worked and have info on a couple stand-out sources (reddit, erfworld) but not have more information on where over 11000 came from.

---

And that’s pretty much it. There’s part of me that thinks I could have \*maybe\* set some additional stretch goals to push for, but ultimately I aligned the goals in a way that was both reasonable for me to produce and exciting. For my life right now, to ‘scale up’ from here would mean to do less writing to focus on managing a team/publishing, and while I’m happy to ‘play those games’ I still want Salt in Wounds to be \*mine\* - I want my fingerprints to be all over this, and my words and sensibilities, and aesthetics to comprise most of it.

Basically, I’ve succeeded in my role as writer, and (with this project at least) my role as fundraiser. Now, I get to practice the role of publisher (with all the subdivisions, complications, and rewards that entails).