

Slide 1

DXiC
Digital Scholarly Editions
Initial Training Network
Grant Agreement No:
217426

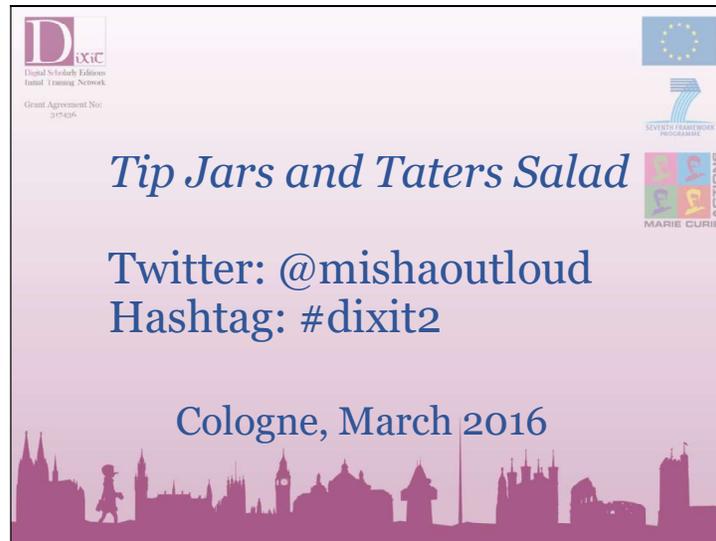
Misha Broughton

**Crowdfunding the
Digital Scholarly
Edition: Webcomics, Tip
Jars, and a Bowl of
Potato Salad**

Cologne, March 2016

SEVENTH FRAMEWORK
PROGRAMME
MARIE CURIE
ACTIONS

The slide features a light purple background with a dark purple silhouette of a city skyline at the bottom. The text is centered, with the author's name in italics and the title in bold. Logos for the Digital Scholarly Editions Initial Training Network, the European Union, the Seventh Framework Programme, and Marie Curie Actions are positioned in the corners.



The slide features a light purple background with a dark purple silhouette of a city skyline at the bottom. In the top left corner, there is a logo for 'Dixit' (Digital Scholarly Editions Initial Training Network) with the grant agreement number '2174296'. In the top right corner, there are logos for the European Union and the Marie Curie Actions program. The main text is centered and reads: 'Tip Jars and Taters Salad', 'Twitter: @mishaoutloud', 'Hashtag: #dixit2', and 'Cologne, March 2016'.

Dixit
Digital Scholarly Editions
Initial Training Network
Grant Agreement No:
2174296

EUROPEAN UNION
SEVENTH FRAMEWORK
PROGRAMME
MARIE CURIE
ACTIONS

Tip Jars and Taters Salad

Twitter: @mishaoutloud
Hashtag: #dixit2

Cologne, March 2016

- INTRO QUESTION: How much would you pay someone to make a bowl of potato salad?
- Parameters: This is a stranger. This is for a single bowl of potato salad. This is not a new potato salad making business. You will not get to eat any of the potato salad.
- This is also not some bizarre extended metaphor for Digital Scholarly Editions. I am not calling your editions a bowl of potato salad no-one wants to eat... But the question is still relevant. Hang on to your answers.

Digital Scholarly Editing has a money mismatch.

- We create editions using grants, over the limited time of the grant.
- When the grant runs out, how do we pay for the hosting costs, migration, upgrades, etc?
- And that's assuming you can even GET a grant...
- As a field, we're dedicated to removing barriers to our scholarships, but we still want to GET PAID.
- How do we monetize "free?"

- We're not the first to run into the problem of how to monetize "giving away specific sequences of 1's and 0's."



- These folks ran to give their information/creations for free pretty much as soon as we did
- And with neither institutional support nor grants available, they wrestled with this problem LONG before we did

The Next 15 Minutes: A User's Guide.

- How did these creators manage monetizing "Free?"
 - A *FAR* from Comprehensive List.
- What do all of these approaches have in common?
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- Almost ubiquitous as soon as Paypal made it possible.
- Largely extinct now because it's a TERRIBLE way of doing it.
- Too little attention drawn to the link and "Everybody thinks Somebody will donate, but Nobody winds up donating."
- Too much attention drawn to the link and you erode the very good will that would cause them to donate.

Approach 1.2: The Fund Drive



day job. So I blew up in a rant on the front page. Amongst my furious, blind ragings, I dared my readers to put their money where there mouth is and give me a salary so I could just stay home and work on the comic full time. My reasoning was more to shut people up. Instead, I

- Randy Millholland dared his readers to donate a years wage to do the comic full time (ostensibly to throw it back in their faces that he was doing this for free)
- What he SUCCEEDED in doing was raising his years salary in a month's time, and then running the comic for several years on yearly repeats.
- Rather than ubiquity of the link, Millholland tied donations to an event – the anniversary of quitting his day job – which allowed him to stress it heavily without burning out good will.
- This model actually similar to Wikipedia's annual fund-drive, as well as American Public Radio/Television.

Approach 1.3: Pay-What-You-Want

ubuntu

Show Ubuntu some love
Or alternatively, help out in the bug tracker :)

Make the desktop more amazing \$ 2
Performance optimization for games and apps \$ 2
Improve hardware support on more PCs \$ 2
Phone and tablet versions of Ubuntu \$ 2
Community participation in Ubuntu development \$ 2
Better coordination with Debian and upstreams \$ 2
Better support for flavors like Kubuntu, Xubuntu, Lubuntu \$ 2
Miscellaneous - they help make it happen \$ 2

The same price as Peace, Love and Linux t-shirt
Contribution \$ 16

Not here, take me to the download > Pay with PayPal

bc bandcamp

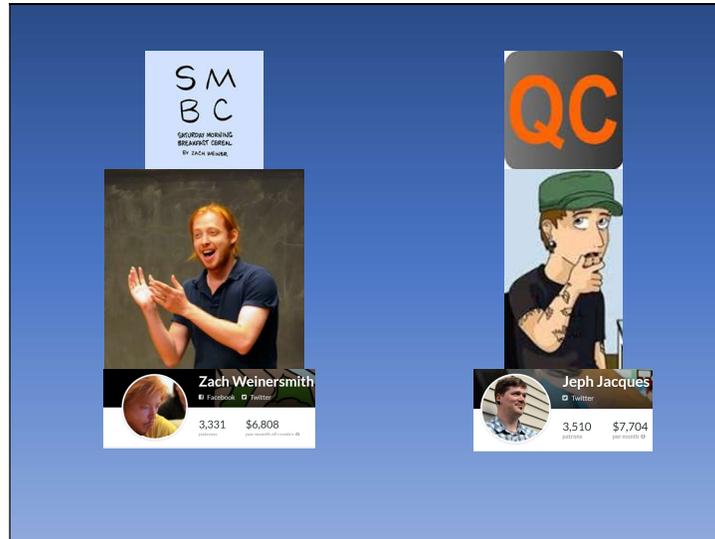
However, in all cases, leaving “let fans pay more if they want” checked is key: fans pay more than the minimum a whopping 40% of the time, driving up the average price paid by nearly 50% (in fact, every day, we see überfans paying \$50, \$100, \$200 for albums priced far lower)

- Perhaps not TECHNICALLY a tip jar, but not unrelated.
- While Milholland (and Wikipedia) tie donations to a recurring TEMPORAL PERIOD, Pay-What-You-Want setups tie donations to a specific TEMPORAL EVENT: the moment when bits are transferred.
- Since we’re already used to money changing hands when a transaction takes place, we’re more prepared to donate in these instances: we’re more likely to consider the value of the transaction.



- Rather than small donations whenever, “Memberships” encourage users to donate a certain amount to “purchase access” to a site support “club” for a particular time period.
- This membership usually includes certain perks, including access to “making of” material, community forums, discounts on merchandise, etc.
- Patreon has taken over this role for most comics I’m aware of (with Sluggy Freelance’s “Defenders of the Nifty” and Erfworld’s “Toolshed” being the notable exceptions that I know of).

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- “Saturday Morning Breakfast Cereal” and “Questionable Content” are solid “high-end-of-the-middle” comics: Not superstars like Penny-Arcade, but not “that guy who did one MS-Paint comic and posted it to GeoCities.”
- They are making Associate Professor amounts of money JUST from their Patreon accounts, which is one of several revenue streams.
- How? It’s split amongst 3000+ people each. They convinced 3000 people to each pony up \$2 a month.
- Can that really be so much more difficult than convincing 4-5 people (on a grant review board) to pony up \$80k (or more)?



- Merchandise sales tend to fall into two categories: souvenirs illustrated with the comic's characters, slogans, etc (t-shirts, stuffed animals, playing cards, keychains), and "Dead Tree Editions," print versions of the material that's available online
- The former case is, arguably, not terrible appropriate to DSE's: who would buy a "Letters of 1916 Project" or a "William Blake Archive" t-shirt?
- The latter case, however, very much IS appropriate: Readers pay money to own physical books that contain (usually lower quality) recreations of material that they can already access, free of charge, from any point on earth with an internet connection.
- **NOTA BENE:** At least one scholarly edition, "Vincent van Gogh The Letters," is already using exactly this approach.

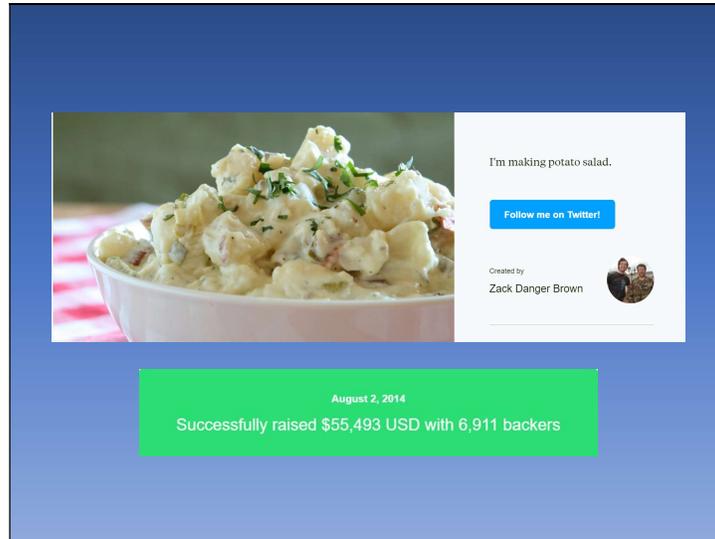


- Nor is this approach limited to webcomics: Cory Doctorow writes near-future science fiction novels, which he provides free of charge as ASCII text files.
- He crowd sources re-formatting into other platforms (Kindle, ePub, etc.) by encouraging users who use those platforms to upload their own transforms for him to re-share.
- He then publishes the books as print editions through Tor, the single largest science fiction publisher in North America.
- Doctorow is not terribly forthcoming about the financial success of this approach, but it's worth noting that he refuses direct donations from fans, encouraging them instead to refer to a list he maintains of libraries in want of a physical copy. That way Doctorow receives proceeds, the publisher receives a cut, the reader gets to support the work, and a library gets a book.
- **NOTA BENE:** When you are successful enough to refuse free money in favor of pushing your business model... you are successful enough.



- While Kickstarter is the most common name in the field, this approach also encompasses “indiegogo” and “GoFundMe”
- I would argue Kickstarter is the most commonly cited because it is the one most taken seriously, due largely to its requirement of a PRODUCT associated with the campaign.
- If you want to pay your cats vet bills, use GoFundMe. If you want to BUILD a cat, use Kickstarter.

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- Here's the potato salad from earlier...
- Zach Brown wanted to challenge Kickstarter's "product" requirement by creating a campaign seeking \$10 to make himself a bowl of potato salad.
- He received \$500 in the first day, and by the end of the month, his total was over \$55,000.
- **NOTA BENE:** Brown was also dismayed to realize that he could not donate this surprising windfall to the Columbus, OH foodbank, as Kickstarter's ToS disallowed direct donations of funds raised to Charity. It did ***NOT***, however, disallow using raised funds to host an enormous potato salad themed fundraising party.



- Exploding Kittens was developed by three guys (each an internet celebrity in his own right), who sought \$10,000 on Kickstarter for a minimal print run.
- The game play was simple, if a bit macabre: Some cards are “kittens” and if they are in your hand at the end of your turn, their wacky kitten hijinks manage to kill you in adorable, yet gruesome, ways.
- The art, from the creator of the webcomic “The Oatmeal” was equally simple, if equally macabre.
- They received their goal in an hour, and had raised \$1M in the first day. At month’s end, they had raised over \$8.7M from over 219,000 backers, making it one of the most successful Kickstarter campaigns in the history of the site.
- **NOTA BENE:** What kind of edition could you create with \$8.7M?

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 - (Cool story, but what's in it for me?)

What do these approaches have in common?

- They are brand driven.
 - The product – and the creator – build that brand.
- They are participatory.
 - What supporters pay for is a chance to belong.
- They are *extremely* “lossy.”
 - Webcomic creators estimate 1-3% donate.
 - But the sheer economy of scale makes it worthwhile.

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- If you're reading this slide by itself, keep reading. I'm fond of presentational irony.

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- Revisiting this slide, I highlight the first and second main bullet points.
- To build a brand of our creation, and to have people pay for the right to participate in – belong to - that brand, requires not readers or users or stakeholders, but FANS.
- And we, as a field of scholarly editors, are not terribly good at making fans.
- In my own experience of scholarly editors – myself included – we tend to play down the work we do, telling others it is not interesting or too abstruse or otherwise not worth talking about.
- And people take us at our word.
- Fandom – enthusiasm – has to come from somewhere, and it has to come, first and foremost, from us.

Well, *is* it appropriate?

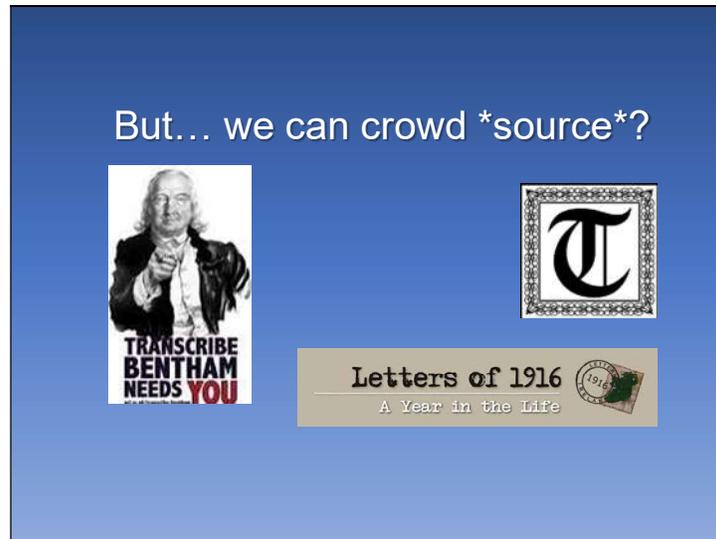
No.

(Probably not.)

(At least not now.)

- Let's complicate that no.
- It's not appropriate NOW, but COULD it be?

But... we can crowd *source*?



- Crowd Sourcing of transcription and tagging is a growing topic (and practice) in the scholarly editing community, with “Transcribe Bentham,” “Typewright for eMop” and “The Letters of 1916 Project” being notable success stories.
- Crowd sourcing is an invitation for enthusiastic volunteers to participate in – and support – the project with their time and labor.
- Why do we think these interested parties would be willing to support us with time, but assume no-one would be willing to support us with money?

How *could* it be appropriate?

- We need to make fans out of readers/users.
 - Enthusiasm is contagious; stop inoculating people.
- We need to ask.
 - No supporting bullet. It really is that simple.
- We need to better understand – and respect – the work of publishers.
 - They did/do more than just print books.

- Where do we go from here? How can we FIND OUT if it could work?
- NOTA BENE: The recognition of publishers in this list was a late addition to my presentation, but – I think – an important one. The progress of publishing scholarly editions online can be described as a steady progression of realizing what we lose when we cut publishers out of the loop: we posted ASCII text files and realized we missed the layout publishers provided. We developed XML and layout technologies to handle layout and realized we still lacked the vetting and review publishers provided. We started arranging our own peer review (e.g. NINES and 18thConnect) and realized we weren't making any money. Publishers don't simply inscribe information on media; those are printers. Publishers make public, and that includes building demand, turning readers/users/stakeholders into fans wishing to participate. If we want to publish without a publisher, we need to be completely honest with ourselves with what the publisher offers us ask how we will do that work ourselves.