

SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)
Space Culture: Innovative Approaches for Public Engagement in Space (9)

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CROWDSOURCING PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT FOR SPACE

Abstract

Space often enjoys special interest from the general public, and the technique of crowdsourcing has become a mechanism to leverage this interest for the benefit of space programs. Crowdsourcing is an open call for assistance on the internet that requires little to no expertise from the audience to participate. NASA, academia, and private companies have all utilized crowdsourcing in some capacity to further their missions – from offsite data processing to financing of small spacecraft. After evaluating the success of crowdsourcing in mission support, the Aerospace Industries Association of America (AIA) created an initiative that draws upon public support for a new kind of space outreach campaign.

Following the end of the Space Shuttle Program, AIA noticed that a misconception seemed to be taking hold in the American media that U.S. human spaceflight was over. AIA found this especially alarming given the power of human spaceflight to inspire students at a very young age to pursue STEM careers. To change this misconception, AIA crowdfunded the placement of a preview trailer in movie theaters during the premier of Star Trek Into Darkness presenting the new era of human spaceflight at hand.

The response from the public was overwhelming. The campaign raised \$52,000 (159% of the original funding goal) from more than 1,700 donors. Much of the campaign's financial success was due to the considerable attention it received on social media, garnering 7,300 Facebook likes, 2,100 tweets, and 2,400 Google +1s, leading to more than 100,000 webpage views. News coverage of the campaign was also impressive – more than 75 media outlets covered the effort, including national outlets such as NBC and Bloomberg. NASA even circulated news of the trailer, adding to the campaign's tweet impression by more than 6 million accounts. Ultimately crowdfunding allowed for the trailer to be seen in more than 50 U.S. cities throughout a week of the summer blockbuster season.

The success of this campaign has demonstrated an exciting new mechanism to keep the public informed and inspired by space activities. This paper will outline how AIA executed the campaign, lessons learned by the organization, and recommendations on how best to duplicate these crowdsourcing techniques to spread awareness of space activities throughout the world.