Crowdsourcing: Leveraging Your Social Networks

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Crowdsourcing: Leveraging Your Social Networks

Posted on August 1, 2009 by Editor

By Michael Geraci

The national marketing firm, Image Communications, recently decided to undergo an overhaul of their corporate name and brand identity. Who did they turn to for assistance with this mission-critical, potentially risky feat? Was it their highly-skilled internal team of brand wizards and creative communicators? No. Was it a high-powered mega firm that specializes in building and launching new brands? No, again. Image Communications turned to you, or at least people like you, and they did it via social networking: Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.[1] They put a call out for a new company name via their established social channels and created the website http://www.helpusnameus.com (that’s “help us name us”), and before long, they had thousands of submissions from over 50 countries on six continents, and they eventually became Pyxl [2] – the submission by DaNice Marshall from Massachusetts.

Image Communications used what is commonly referred to as crowdsourcing for their rebranding effort. Crowdsourcing, as a term, is credited to Jeff Howe of Wired Magazine after his June 2006 article, “The Rise of Crowdsourcing”. [3] But the concept has been around on the Internet, in one form or another, for close to a decade. Howe defines crowdsourcing as:

*The act of a company or institution taking a function once performed by employees and outsourcing it to an undefined (and generally large) network of people in the form of an open call.*[4]

While this definition firmly places the concept in the context of today’s popular social networking channels, variations of crowdsourcing can be tracked back to the creation and evolution of Wikipedia and even Google’s search results ranking algorithm, which, in case you didn’t know, orders search results based (at least partially) on which hits are more popular as determined by the number of web pages across the Internet that link to said results.
Crowdsourcing has some revenue-generating potential as well. If you haven’t purchased stock media on iStockPhoto.com, you’re missing out on access to nearly 5 million pieces of high quality media all supplied by… wait for it… average everyday folks, aspiring artists, and maybe the occasional professional who is willing to sell his or her work at such a steep discount, they are probably losing sleep over it, right now. At iStock Web-ready photos and illustrations start at $1 and go to a maximum of $27 for something you could stick on the side of a bus. Once you create a free account, you are able to post your own work for sale on the service.

One interesting example of entrepreneurial crowdsourcing is Cambrian House,[5] which is an online service that enables crowds to propose, design, develop, and make money on technology solutions. From 2005 to 2008, Cambrian House worked with a pool of 50,000 people who willingly volunteered their time and brainpower to generate some 7,000 ideas for technology driven products and services. This same crowd vetted the pool of ideas through online voting, messaging and contests; and then worked together to spec out how the winning ideas would function. Then, this same group, or at least those most qualified, actually developed the products with on-going oversight and input from the masses. Contributors earn “royalty points” – essentially virtual stock in the project. When the project launches and generates revenue, royalty points are redeemed for cold, hard cash. If you’re wondering exactly what Cambrian House adds to this equation, the answer is: a system that enables it to function optimally. Cambrian House’s press releases indicate that top earners in their community can make over $50,000 a year contributing to projects that have “good growth potential”[6].

So successful was the Cambrian House system, it was spun off in 2008 and became Chaordix [7] (the synthesis of chaos and order), a commercial service provider of enterprise-level crowdsourcing technology.

The green movement, very much a grass-roots collective of technically savvy, community-minded folks, has also tapped into the wisdom of their masses. Greenwala [8] is a social network “made of people who help others live a greener lifestyle by sharing their knowledge, green experiences and actions with friends, family and the world.”[9] The organization’s site is the home base of the network, but members can participate in the network via major online social channels (e.g. Facebook, mySpace, Twitter, LinkedIn).

But for real crowdsourced ideas and solutions with a green tint, look no further than How Can I Recycle This?[10], a UK-based site where people can post questions about what to do with household items once they are no longer needed. The community responds with highly creative solutions. For example, a post on May 20, 2009 asked “How can I reuse or recycle cassette tape cases?”[11] Among the responses: ice scrapers, gift boxes, and photo frames – not bad! A quick sum of their archives yields myriad ideas for the reuse of over 1000 everyday objects.

Despite good ideas and good intentions, there is some skepticism about just how effective and “wise” crowds can be. There seems to be a fine line between harnessing the power of collective intelligence and turning a mob loose to hammer out a solution to your specific need. In his March
22, 2007 post on ReadWriteWeb [12], Josh Catone [13], an active technology blogger, offers these suggestions for maximizing your return from crowdsourcing efforts:

- Crowdsourcing should come with pre-established rules that aim to maintain order in the process.
- In certain situations (i.e. a organizational re-branding effort), the final decision should be made by a central authority either within the organization or a designated subset of the community.
- Avoid groupthink. Crowds should be encouraged to debate and defend all ideas. Keep an eye out for “movements” within a group that try to assert undue influence over the crowd.
- Let crowds evaluate and appraise content, do not let crowds create content. Too many cooks in the kitchen… you know? [14]

The real question is how can crowdsourcing be used to great effect in our organizations? As an educator, should I put out an open call for ideas for a new class I’m creating? Could I query my LinkedIn network for curriculum changes that will have the most relevance and marketability in the current job market? Could I post anonymous versions of my students’ creative work on Facebook and ask my 100 friends to choose their favorites? It’s going to take some trial and error to dial this in. Then again, maybe I should pose this question to the masses and see what I get back…

**To learn more about crowdsourcing:**

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crowdsourcing

http://www.openinnovators.net/list-open-innovation-crowdsourcing-examples/

http://crowdsourcingexamples.pbworks.com/

http://crowdsourcing.typepad.com/

**Endnotes**


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17 THOUGHTS ON “CROWDSOURCING: LEVERAGING YOUR SOCIAL NETWORKS”

**SEO Services PHX**
on January 30, 2014 at 3:43 AM said:

Amazing! Its in fact amazing article, I have got much clear idea regarding from this paragraph.

**bail bonds aurora co**
on January 30, 2014 at 11:11 AM said:

I could not resist commenting. Exceptionally well written!

**naija social network**
on January 30, 2014 at 11:36 AM said:

thank u … this sort of a fascinating topic
Arapahoe  
on **January 30, 2014 at 12:29 PM** said:

I drop a comment when I especially enjoy a post on a website or I have something to add to the conversation.

Usually it is caused by the passion displayed in the post I read. And on this article Crowdsourcing: Leveraging Your Social Networks | Interface.

I was moved enough to leave a comment 😊 I actually do have 2 questions for you if it’s okay. Could it be simply me or do some of these comments come across as if they are written by brain dead visitors?

😊 And, if you are writing at additional sites, I’d like to follow you.

Could you list the complete urls of all your community pages like your twitter feed, Facebook page or linkedin profile?

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**website**  
on **January 30, 2014 at 6:28 PM** said:

It’s like you read my mind! You seem to know a lot about this, like you wrote the book in it or something. I think that you could do with a few pics to drive the message home a little bit, but instead of that, this is wonderful blog.

An excellent read. I will certainly be back.

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**web site**  
on **January 30, 2014 at 9:13 PM** said:

This piece of writing will help the internet viewers for building up new web site or even a weblog from start to end.
Toronto boardroom tables on February 1, 2014 at 12:51 AM said:

Howdy! Would you mind if I share your blog with my myspace group?

There’s a lot of people that I think would really enjoy your content. Please let me know. Thank you

plotka on February 1, 2014 at 1:49 AM said:

A person basically help to create a lot content articles I would state. This is the first time I frequented your web site document and up to now? I amazed in the analysis you produced to build this real write-up extraordinary. Excellent task!

donosy on February 1, 2014 at 2:15 AM said:

Great blog appropriate here! Additionally your website loads up very fast! What host are you the usage of? Can I get your associate link on your host? I wish my website loaded up as simply as yours lol

site on February 2, 2014 at 2:16 AM said:

Hi there, its nice piece of writing about media print, we all know media is a wonderful source of information.

social network on February 2, 2014 at 3:51 PM said:
Hey, thank you for the feedback! I would suggest that saying “God died on a cross” is not specific more than enough theological terminology to accurately describe what happened there. Vague terminology like that may lead to deviant thinking for the trinity. Of course I do not feel it is the cardinal sin to use vague phrases, but I feel it can reveal our confusion when it comes to the trinity.

seo cost

on February 2, 2014 at 6:07 PM said:

Magnificent goods from you, man. I’ve understand your stuff previous to and you’re just extremely excellent.

I actually like what you have acquired here, really like what you are saying and the way in which you say it. You make it entertaining and you still take care of to keep it smart. I can’t wait to read far more from you. This is really a wonderful site.

nigeria

on February 3, 2014 at 1:35 AM said:

thank u … this kind of a interesting topic

catholicism 101

on February 4, 2014 at 4:23 PM said:

I leave a leave a response whenever I appreciate a article on a site oor I have someting to add to the discussion. It’s triggered by the sincerness communicatted in the article I read. And on this article Crowdsourcing: Leveraging Your Social Networks | Interface. I was moved enough to drop a thought 😊 I actually do have some questions for you if you do not mind.

Could it be oly me or do some of the responses appear loke written by brain dead people?
And, if you are writing at other online social sites, I’d like to keep up with you. Could you make a list the complete urls of your shared sites like your linkedin profile, Facebook page or twitter feed?

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**nigeria dating**  
*on February 5, 2014 at 12:17 AM said:*

This incredibly answered my drawback, thank you!

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**Make Money Fast**  
*on February 5, 2014 at 5:18 AM said:*

At times they might give you around 50gp but they will also provide you a big bone which you may sell off to others who want to get their prayer up. One of the easiest and fastest ways is to start out being an affiliate marketer. But before promoting or selling any products you must have to choose only your interested products.

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**Clifford**  
*on February 6, 2014 at 9:16 AM said:*

I’m gone to inform my little brother, that he should also go to see this blog on regular basis to obtain updated from most up-to-date news update.