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The Power of Crowdsourcing

Most businesses realize how important it is to reach customers and other stakeholders if they expect long-term success. In the last few years, a rather casual but extremely powerful approach to reaching others has emerged. It's called CrowdSourcing and you can see it almost anywhere.

For example, weather forecasters and traffic reporters reach out to the general public to call in and report events, allowing them to quickly report on things they otherwise could never hope to cover. Journalist and authors often practice this technique – trying to get to the real story by reaching the masses as opposed to a few.

Crowdsourcing taps into the global world of ideas, helping companies work through a rapid design process. You outsource to large crowds (hence the word: crowdsourcing) in an effort to make sure your products or services are right.

What makes crowdsourcing so powerful is the broad participation that takes place at relatively no costs. Solutions are generated from volunteers or free lance professionals who get paid only if you use their ideas.

There is also a wealth of creativity that people are more than willing to share if they only had an opportunity to participate. This is particularly true when using the internet to facilitate crowdsourcing. Examples include people creating and posting videos on YouTube or the power of communities that come together behind political campaigns such as Barack Obama.

"Crowdsourcing has virtually overnight generated huge buzz, enthusiasm, and fear. It's the application of the open-source idea to any field outside of software, taking a function performed by people in an organization, such as reporting done by journalist, research and product development by scientists, or design of a T-shirt, for example, and in effect outsourcing it through an open-air broadcast on the Internet. Crowdsourcing has already had a huge impact on large corporations such as Proctor & Gamble." - Crowdsourcing: Why the Power of the Crowd is Driving the Future of Business by Jeff Howe

There are numerous avenues for crowdsourcing, such as enlisting volunteers, hot lines, internet blogs, viewer participation incentives, idea communities, free products or flying people in. Some companies, such as IdeaScale, WhyzeGroup, and Inno Centive, specialize in delivering crowds so that you can instantly tap into a pre-select group of people who seek to assist in designing your products.

Given how powerful this resource is and the very nominal costs involved, it makes good business sense for all of us to think in terms of how we can tap into these global crowds of creativity. This allows a company to drive innovation through mass collaboration and innovation is at the heart of remaining competitive.

"Despite the jargon name, crowdsourcing is a very real and important business idea. Definitions and terms vary, but the basic idea is to tap into the collective intelligence of the public at large to complete business related tasks that a company would normally either perform itself or outsource to a third-party provider. Yet free labor is only a narrow part of crowdsourcing's appeal. More importantly, it enables managers to expand the size of their talent pool while also gaining deeper insight into what customers really want." - What is Crowdsourcing by Jennifer Alsever