

Thinc is turning 25 and to celebrate, we have chosen to look to the future and what it might hold for our clients and society more broadly. Through our Thinc Beyond business, we track dozens of megatrends that are shaping the environment in which we will operate; trends that have the potential to be game changers and disrupt business – for good and for bad. We use them to help our clients transform how they do business, plan for the future, position their projects for success and unlock possibilities they never knew existed. During our anniversary year, we will focus on one megatrend per month, starting with crowdsourcing.



The 'in' crowd

What could crowdsourcing mean for your business? At a time when competition is fierce, and everyone battles for valuable dollars and client loyalty, many organisations are searching for the next big thing that will offer them a new idea or a solution to a complex problem in order to stay one step ahead.

Staying stagnant or continuing on the same path because "that's always

how we have done business" can see an organisation's market share slip away. Organisations need to stop, think and ask "what if?"

Examining trends can broaden horizons and open minds to new opportunities and innovative ideas. As the market landscape evolves, considering available trends can identify markets that organisations may never have thought of before, and with that take up strategic opportunities.

In the search for these strategic opportunities, one such trend that can tap into the minds of the consumers and experts is crowdsourcing. Crowdsourcing can provide organisations with information that can influence the outcome of their next project or product, or to identify a completely new one.

What is crowdsourcing?

First coined by Wired magazine journalist Jeff Howe in June 2006, crowdsourcing describes the trend of outsourcing tasks to an undefined large group or people to leverage their ideas, insights and expertise. The internet has offered big and small business the ability to instantly connect with over two billion people worldwide. What ideas and

opinions could two billion people offer your business?

Crowdsourcing can be applied in a variety of ways. There are four basic approaches: crowdwisdom – collective intelligence that relies on a crowd to solve complex problems; crowdcreation which calls upon the creative talents of a crowd; crowdvoting; and crowdfunding where the aim is to raise money through a crowd.

Already used by some major commercial brands such as PepsiCo and Ben & Jerry's to come up with new flavours and advertising, Toyota went one step further asking for suggestions and ideas on how their technology could be used to make the world a better place. In an environment that is constantly changing, Toyota recognised the need to change their values and propositions as an organisation and use untapped resources to find a new level of innovations.

What if the search for innovative ideas was applied to the medical sector? Could a new use for current technology that hasn't been thought of yet offer a breakthrough that modern medicine has been looking for? In the search for a



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cure for fatal conditions and diseases, do many hands really make light work? And what would it mean for a patient if a dozen, or fifty, or a hundred of the world's brightest minds treated them at once?

It was this way of thinking that made researchers at the Harvard Medical School turn to crowdsourcing to answer the question: What do we not know to cure Type 1 Diabetes? A total of 190 submissions were received from the whole of the Harvard community – faculty, students, and administrators and staff of all levels and specialties – enabling a large, multidisciplinary panel to select 12 pioneering ideas for attacking Type 1 Diabetes.

Whilst many mature organisations or sectors can be resistant to change and limited in their approach to innovation and considering trends, the Icelandic parliament turned to trends to pioneer a new constitution. After its banks and government collapsed when the country was in the depths of a financial crisis, Iceland combined crowdsourcing and social media to form a draft constitution. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr and its own website page have all been used to

allow citizens to share their ideas as to what the constitution should contain. The final draft is set to be put forward to the Icelandic parliament later this year.

Wikipedia is probably one of the most recognised crowdsourcing examples to date. Its 19 million articles have been written collaboratively by volunteers around the world, and almost all of its articles can be edited by anyone with access to the site. So far, over a 100 million hours of input and over a billion edits have been involved – for free. And now, Wikipedia successfully generates 8.5 million views daily, and has accuracy to rival the Encyclopaedia Britannica.

Although this can be held up as a successful use of crowdsourcing, Wikipedia co-founder Jimmy Wales has been a vocal critic of the term crowdsourcing, stating that “If it feels like work, I have to get paid for it. In the consumer space, people aren't going to do it for strategic business reasons, they're going to do it because it's fun.”

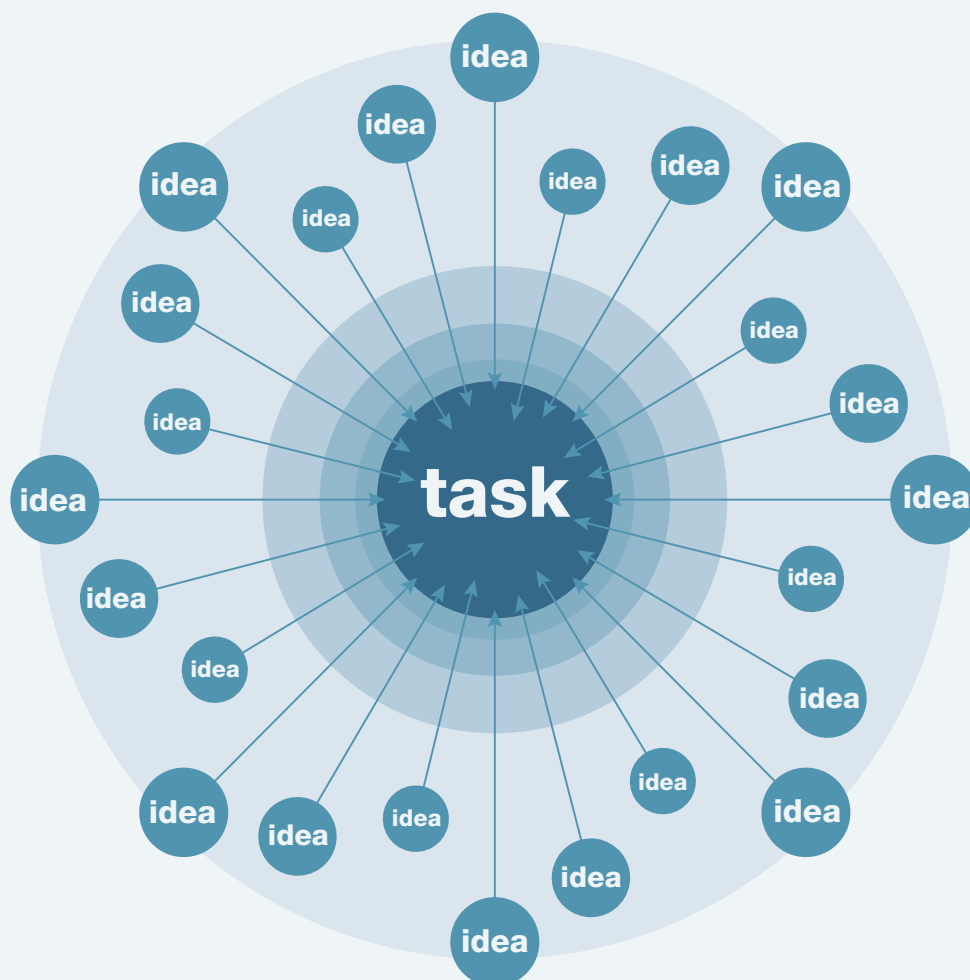
Whilst many believe that this insight into their customers' wants and desires can create a more loyal customer base, others feel that crowdsourcing is being

increasingly used as a PR tool rather than a useful instrument in effective engagement.

In fact, for the benefit of a good story, it is not even necessary for crowdsourcing to be a success. In the quest to name the new Vegemite product in 2009, did Kraft Foods turn to the old adage “all publicity is good publicity” by choosing a name they knew would be rejected by the Australian public in order to ride a wave of free publicity?

When Kraft Foods asked the Australian and New Zealand populations to come up with a name for a new project – just like it did in 1923 when Vegemite was first launched – iSnack 2.0 was chosen from more than 48,000 suggestions. Almost instantly after the announcement was made at quarter time during the 2009 AFL Grand Final thousands hit the internet and used social media to share their hatred for the name. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube lit up with Australians screaming their contempt for the new name.

Four days after the announcement, Kraft Foods admitted that the new name was a flop and withdrew it from



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the market. Once again turning to the public to vote for a new name from a list of other suggestions, Cheesymite was eventually chosen. Almost two years later, the question still remains: Did they fail on purpose?

As Kraft Foods proved, turning to trends like crowdsourcing not only presents strategic opportunities but also opens organisations up to strategic risks. However, this is not always a negative thing. Recognising these strategic risks can enable organisations to build contingency plans to deal with unexpected situations.

Even organisations that are considered to be innovative now have the potential to become stagnant if they do not consider trends and prepare themselves for the future risks – especially if competitors have recognised the potential of examining such trends.

If an organisation's competitors are engaging with their customers through crowdsourcing more effectively than them, what will it mean for their business? Will this extra engagement lead to a more loyal customer base and bigger market share?

Crowdsourcing may be the 'here and now' and the new buzz word on social media, but the answers provided might not be what organisations really want to hear.

Organisations might be happy to ask what their customers wanted BEFORE they started development, but are they really going to change their perspective or adapt to meet the market? Or is it really just another way to manage their public image?

Green DC Realty and CoolTown Beta Communities have given environmentally-conscious consumers the power of design as they embark on their quest to develop attainably priced green condos. America's first ever crowdsourcing for green development is using their potential customers' insights to make the triple bottom line more attainable. Will it work? Only time will tell.

Used improperly, crowdsourcing can lead to useless, wasteful results: two, twenty, two hundred, or a thousand heads are not always better than one. For every success, there are failures. However, crowdsourcing, if comparatively tested and found to be the right tool, in the right context, at the right time, and used in the right way can add another dimension of success for an organisation. Whilst there is no silver bullet, why not be open to new opportunities that change is creating?

To find out more about how you can leverage trends to help your business or project, contact the Thinc Beyond team on thincbeyond@thincprojects.com **T**

About Thinc Beyond

The time has come to provoke a new way of thinking and to challenge organisations to ask "What if?"

Thinc Beyond is the vehicle to help organisations to open their minds to the potential of new strategic opportunities. Thinc Beyond provides advice on trends and how organisations can take steps to turn this advice into action – and in turn adopt the trends that are right for you.

To unlock the future possibilities for your business, and to ensure your business stays agile, talk to Elena Bondareva and the team at Thinc Beyond.