

## 4.4: Crowdsourcing

Organizations have long used techniques such as brainstorming, the Delphi technique, and quality circles for employees and managers to generate creative solutions to problems. **Crowdsourcing** Howe (2006). is a similar idea on a larger scale using the Web to reach a larger set of problem solvers. Problems are made available via the Internet in the form of an open call for solutions. Participants (the crowd) may be customers, suppliers, employees, member communities, or simply the general public. The participants suggest solutions to the problem, discuss their merits or disadvantages, and select favorite choices. Participants can be motivated to do so through awards, recognition, or financial compensation. Participants are potential end users of the product and are generally willing to provide ideas and solutions from that aspect.

Sustainable businesses can benefit from crowdsourcing, which also has been referred to as community-based design, as a substitute for in-house R&D to reduce overhead and staffing expenses. Businesses can create their own online crowdsourcing site or they can utilize one of the many links that are currently available. Online discussion and voting from the community at large provides results similar to company-driven marketing research. Companies can obtain feedback, ideas, and solutions from a wider range of talent, which can conceivably develop better products with faster time to market and at lower costs.

As an example, InnoCentive provides outsource research functions to a variety of disciplines such as life sciences, computer science, business and entrepreneurship, engineering, and chemistry. Sustainable organizations can register with InnoCentive as solution seekers, while individuals can register as solvers. Organizations post a dilemma or problem for which they are seeking a solution, and the open community of solvers is available to offer suggestions and solutions.

For example, SunNight Solar developed solar-powered flashlights for use in developing countries and areas without electricity. The initial design provided task lighting, but the goal was to create another design to replace kerosene lanterns (a safety and environmental hazard) and to illuminate entire rooms. After several failed design attempts, SunNight Solar CEO Mark Bent turned to InnoCentive and put forth the design challenge to InnoCentive's social network of over 140,000 solvers. The challenge was solved and the new SL-2 light, or Super BOGO, was sent into production.

Other crowdsourcing venues that outsource for a broad range of industries or disciplines include Innovation Exchange, NineSigma, Fellowforce, and Yet2.com. Retrieved March 23, 2009, from <http://www.yet2.com> CrowdSPRING Retrieved March 26, 2009, from <http://www.crowdspring.com> focuses on contributions for logo design, business card design, graphic design, Web site design, and photography. Amazon created a platform called the Amazon Mechanical Turk Retrieved March 26, 2009, from <https://www.mturk.com/mturk/welcome> on which tasks called "HITS" (Human Intelligence Tasks) can be made public for people to work on and receive compensation.

As with other functions of the business, sustainability brings new ways of thinking to the task of R&D. From the way products are designed to the way research is conducted and problems are solved, sustainability challenges our old mindsets.

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