

Episode 78: What is crowdsourcing and how do I use it?



"Crowdsourcing" was first coined by Jeff Howe in a June 2006 Wired article.

1. What is it?

Howe says in some markets the gap between professionals and amateurs has been diminished. Thus, if you ask enough amateurs, you get answers as good as a few professionals.

In 'Wisdom of Crowds' James Surowiecki goes further.

He implies that large groups are always better than asking a smarter but elite few.

Ask a thousand amateurs the size of something and take their average.

That average is probably closer to the correct answer than asking one professional.

2. How to use it?

Some think of crowdsourcing as a form of social media interaction. It's better to think of it as Market Intelligence

Others see crowdsourcing as cheap way to get people to help you develop your product or idea.

As each of our companies and organizations is different, so is the use of crowdsourcing

The quickest way to get input is ask people at your company. But does always asking the same people get you new ideas?

If you look at some of the tools people use, you see how they get new ideas:

- SurveyMonkey is a great way of getting some market intelligence.

- InnoCentive calls itself a problem solving tool to CS answers to big issues.

- NineSigma – an open network of external resources to solve challenges.

- Stylefactory – a website where you can help choose what's next.

But don't forget - you can use your own website, Facebook, LinkedIn or an SM tool.

3. Things to be cautious of

They say you get what you pay for and what's free is worthless - so don't go into this expecting something for nothing.

Do you really want to ask 1000 people who know nothing about your business?

Some of the tools I have listed are chargeable, screen people and pay them.

Be sensitive to who is in your crowd – it maybe your competition.

You may also want legal advice to work out how to protect what you are crowdsourcing.

I often see crowdsourcing being done under the Creative Commons license.

Finally, this is not going to happen by itself - you have to dedicate time and people.

Bottom line: Despite what we first think, good CS is neither free or easy, but it might give you access to thinking and resource that you wouldn't be able to get any other way.