

Crowdsourcing for modern day packaging innovation



SRIMAN BANERJEE, CPP

Crowdsourcing evolved as part of the Internet revolution and was first used in 2005. It's the process of seeking contributions from a large pool of online community for services or ideas, rather than using traditional means.

The best example of crowdsourcing is Wikipedia. Crowdsourcing is used for:

- Design
- Innovation
- Advice and consultation
- Crowdfunding

In the field of packaging, crowdsourcing is being used extensively for graphic designs and logos. The big breakthrough is coming in the use of crowdsourcing for packaging innovation.

Crowdsourcing for packaging innovation provides unconventional solutions and alternate packaging formats that revolutionize the way consumers buy, use, and consume products. It can create differentiation at trade and provide a growth impetus to the packaging and end-user industries. It would enable partnership with other industries to co-create packaging solutions for modern day requirements.

How does crowdsourcing work?

There are multiple ways crowdsourcing can be done: through a commercially available website, using your company's intranet platform, using a company Internet page, etc. Contributions are sought from the online community on a proposed product idea. Based on the motivation factor—monetary or otherwise—you would receive several ideas from a cross-functional global Internet community. You can either use a single-concept or mix-and-match approach and co-create the best concept.

This approach also enables a concept that cuts across different geographies and cultures and includes inclusiveness and diversity. It also enables cross fertilization of technology, which would have been a challenge using the traditional approach to ideation.

For example, we know it is difficult to pour certain viscous liquids out of containers. To achieve a wide-based solution, we utilize the concept of crowdsourcing and run an online ideation effort—either through a commercial platform (available with commercial companies specializing in crowdsourcing) or a contest (through Facebook, LinkedIn or the intranet)—and generate ideas and concepts. It is always ideal to extend the reach of your overall targeted online community rather than limiting it only to the packaging community.

By casting your net across a wider audience, you will receive several ideas and concepts from the diversified Internet community. The ideas would come from consumers, suppliers, retailers, technologists, inven-

tors, etc. Based on the received ideas and concepts and subsequent assessment, you can either pick the best or mix-and-match to move forward in a way that meets your requirements.

Heineken, Orbit, and a couple of fast-moving consumer goods companies have started using this platform for packaging innovation. Interestingly, this concept is widely used by smaller companies rather than established, large corporations.

Concept of crowdsourcing:

Traditional	Crowdsourcing
Limited to existing pool suppliers or employees	Unlimited internet community with diversified experience
Within your existing geography	Global opportunity
Limited knowledge & options	Multi-lateral knowledge & options
Conventional solutions	Innovative solutions
Unidirectional	Opportunity to mix and match

As with everything, the process has its pros and cons. Crowdsourcing enables you to tap into a vast global talent pool in a short amount of time in a cost-effective manner. It enables you to connect in areas and with people it would have been challenging to connect with traditionally. One con is that for effectiveness and quality, the brief needs to be clear. Several areas are evolving in terms of IP ownership, compensation, etc. These areas merit watching by any company interested in crowdsourcing.

If crowdsourcing appears to be a viable option for you, understand that it is not a free endeavour. Individuals need to be compensated for their work.

Crowdsourcing's future

Crowdsourcing today is in its infancy and is being used in a very limited manner. However, it has a huge potential to grow and expand, given the unlimited possibilities and the enormous number of ideas that can be generated and cross fertilized.

Crowdsourcing is the start of the innovation movement to move from a physical platform to a digital platform, thereby enabling a higher level of participation and co-creation. This also provides emerging business opportunities and new ventures with a focus on packaging innovation and services. **PW**

Sriman Banerjee, CPP is Head of Packaging—Respiratory Category at GlaxoSmithKline Consumer Healthcare. For further information about the Institute of Packaging Professionals, visit www.iopp.org.