

Most Brains Wins

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What do Google, Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, eBay and Wikipedia have in common? Besides being six of the fastest growing organizations in history and making several of their founders billionaires in less than a decade, they all utilize a new reality of the information age – whoever leverages the most brains wins! Figure out how to do this better than your competition and you win big.

The subtitle of James Surowiecki's best-selling book *The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many are Smarter Than the Few and How Collective Wisdom Shapes Business, Economics, Societies, and Nations* is another take on this new strategic weapon. It's no longer sufficient to have just a smart executive team. You need to launch initiatives to access the collective wisdom of your employees, customers, and the broader world around you.

Besides reading Surowiecki's book (quicker yet, just read the collective wisdom of Wikipedia's overview!), read Steven Johnson's breakthrough book *Emergence: The Connected Lives of Ants, Brains, Cities, and Software*. It's Emergence Theory that drives the success of the organizations listed above. You not only have to understand and apply this theory to your business, you need to start doing it immediately – so jump on Amazon, another Emergence Theory company, and place your order.

In past columns I've touched on several approaches to tap into the collective intelligence of your marketplace including the systematic gathering of customer and employee feedback and the use of wikis to capture and organize this information. There is also some innovative new "community" or "networking" technologies that aid in helping your customers connect with and help each other and in the process, help you.

4000 Pages in One Year

Lee Rosen, President of Raleigh-Durham based Rosen Law Firm (disclosure: they are a client) knew he needed to capture the intellectual capital of his employees and find a way to efficiently organize the information necessary to run his thriving law practice that specializes in divorce cases. Launching an internal wiki, Rosen notes "I used a \$1000 contest to encourage our lawyers and staff to contribute to the wiki and within a year we had over 4000 pages of intellectual content!" For more details, Rosen pointed me to a February 2008 *FORTUNE Small Business* magazine article about how companies are [using wikis](#) featuring his firm (Google will help you find the article).

My company recently launched a public wiki devoted to collecting examples of quarterly themes. Within a few days of announcing the website, many of our long standing clients took the time to populate the wiki with past quarterly theme ideas, photos, and detailed write-ups. This, in turn, is now a valuable resource to the rest of our clients which strengthens our market position as a source of tools and ideas for helping executives grow their businesses.

And we decided to house our wiki on a large public site called AboutUs.org. Founded by one of the top five thought leaders in the wiki space, Ray King, we were advised to avoid becoming a wiki-island onto ourselves. Why is this important? A significant and powerful aspect of wikis is the ability to link to other wiki pages. And it's this rich-link environment that helps raise the profile of your information on search engines. So it's important that your wiki, if you want it to be found by others, is housed where it can connect with many other wiki pages. If you want to check out the wiki, go to AboutUs.org and search for "quarterly themes."

IntroNetworks "community"

We've also ventured into the community building aspect of our business. Whereas I can see teenagers spending a great deal of time on community websites like Facebook and MySpace, it's been hard for me to imagine our network of 15,000 executives of growth firms taking the time to visit and benefit from a networking site. In turn, I know there is a tremendous amount of shared experience and talent among these executives if only they could efficiently tap into this reservoir of knowledge.

Spending \$15,000, we licensed a system called IntroNetworks – the same system the famous TED conference uses to network their attendees. What their system does is help the people in your network build specific profiles and then through the magic of various algorithms, determines who should talk to whom. Think of it as a matching/dating service for your customers where they can reach out and help each other. And since they are your customers, they likely have various common points of interest.

Within a week of our IntroNetwork's-supported community, one of the 15,000 executives in our network contacted me to say he might be able to help with a business challenge I personally posted on the network site. And it was someone I didn't even realize was in the network!

We did connect and he was able to help me determine two concrete courses of action to solve my challenge. For me, that's knowledge I would have never accessed had there not been the technology to facilitate the introduction.

At your next executive meeting, tackle the question "how can we dramatically increase the number of brains we can access to drive our business." Then do it and let me know what you create -- I need your brain as well!