**It’s Time To Follow The Crowd: The Wisdom of Co-Creation**

An interesting experiment took place in 1907. The English statistician, Sir Francis Galton, asked 787 villagers at a local county fair to guess the weight of an ox. No one guessed the right answer. However, when Galton averaged their answers together, the result was closer to the true weight than their individual answers or any of the cattle experts’ estimates. In his book, “The Wisdom of Crowds,” James Surowiecki explores the idea that large groups of people are smarter than an elite few, no matter how brilliant or better they area at solving problems, fostering innovation or predicting the future. In other words, large group input can aggregate individual knowledge to successfully solve problems together.

This idea may seem to go against everything we learned as children. When you were younger, you may have been told not to “follow the crowd.” The crowd was assumed to be a mentality where individual judgment and wise decisions were forsaken for a hyped-up mob consensus. However, technology today has allowed the wisdom of crowds to play a part of our lives more than ever before. Uber crowdsources rides, AirBNB provides places to stay, GoFundMe crowdfunds ventures of all kinds. As a result, more and more companies are tapping into the power of crowds.

However, four key conditions must be met to avoid the mob mentality that can so often arise:

* Diversity of Opinion: (Each person should have their own opinion)
* Independence: (Individuals’ opinions shouldn’t be determined by those around them)
* Decentralization: (People are able to specialize and draw upon local knowledge)
* Aggregation: (A mechanism to turn individual judgment into collective decisions)

Online communities, in particular, are providing the necessary conditions that allow marketers to successfully tap into insights within a general crowd or target group. Although the group may have some commonalities, it’s the diversity of perspectives within the community that makes the insights so powerful. We’re not looking for overall consensus within these groups. Instead, we are looking for individual input that, taken together, illuminates patterns and provides compelling guidance.

Note that we are not talking about social media monitoring, where companies monitor what is being said on social channels like Twitter or Facebook. Instead, these private, online communities are specifically recruited to help solve business issues at hand. Communities can range from 20-50 in number and are often made up of people from all across the country. Each community is actively moderated and many questions/exercises are completed in a private section of the community to avoid group bias. Responses are then analyzed together to provide direction to the business. This method is especially powerful in new product development, where the “wisdom of the crowd” or co-creation often provides stronger input than the opinions of marketers (who may be too close to the product to see potential opportunities).

Are you ready to follow the crowd?