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David Alan Grier

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by David Alan Grier

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Crowdsourcing For Dummies®

Published by: **John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.**, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, www.wiley.com

This edition first published 2013

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Registered office

John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, United Kingdom

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-119-94040-1 (pbk), ISBN 978-1-119-94384-6 (ebk), ISBN 978-1-119-94386-0 (ebk), ISBN 978-1-119-94385-3 (ebk)

Printed in Great Britain by Bell & Bain Ltd, Glasgow

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Introduction

Crowdsourcing is the latest revolution wrought by the technologies of computing and communication – a revolution that brings people together and harnesses their collective intelligence. The power of crowdsourcing is such that it's created political revolutions and toppled governments. At turbulent times, crowdsourcing has deployed *the crowd* – the group of people who actually do the work required – as a collective witness to follow the actions of governments, record speeches and monitor elections. And yet, at a more modest level in everyday life, crowdsourcing can still revolutionise the way you go about things. Crowdsourcing enables you to work with people who have specialised skills, to engage massive groups of workers, to collect data that you couldn't have gathered previously and to offer advice that's far beyond experience.

Crowdsourcing can change your life. It connects you to a massive crowd of people who can bring their skill, experience and knowledge to everything you do in your business, your non-profit organisation and even in your daily life. When you work with the crowd, you no longer work alone. You have the power of the crowd behind you, a crowd that will change the way you work, the way you plan and even the very way you think.

About This Book

Crowdsourcing For Dummies is here to help you become a *crowdsourcer* – a person who manages the crowdsourcing process, whether in a business, a non-profit organisation or just in everyday life. This book gives you the tools you need for each stage of the crowdsourcing process. I show you:

- ✓ How to identify the activities you currently undertake that may benefit from crowdsourcing
- ✓ How to determine the best form of crowdsourcing to use for your project
- ✓ How to engage the crowd
- ✓ How to get started, see a project through to completion and start again with a new project

In this book, I give you a broad perspective on crowdsourcing. I look at the common forms of crowdsourcing, such as crowdfunding and crowdcontests, as well as the lesser-known forms, such as self-organised crowds, so that you can think about different approaches to using the crowd and the ways in which you can best use crowdsourcing to suit your own needs or those of your organisation.

This book is also here to help you understand the information about crowdsourcing that you can find on the Internet. The Internet is constantly producing new information about crowdsourcing and is an important source of reference, but this book puts that information into context.

Conventions Used in This Book

To help you navigate your way through this book, I've set up a few straightforward conventions:

- ✓ I use *italics* for emphasis and to highlight new words or define terms.
- ✓ I use **bold** to indicate the key concepts in a list.
- ✓ I alternate between male and female pronouns in the chapters to be fair to both genders.

What You're Not to Read

You're undoubtedly a wise and experienced individual who can identify the pieces of the book that you should read and the pieces that you can ignore. And although I like to think that you'll be hanging on my every word, I know that you may not want to read the whole book. If you skip bits of it, you won't hurt my feelings.

There are sections of the book that you can skip or put aside for later. Sidebars, for example. I love the sidebars, although they usually contain historical or contextual information that's completely and utterly fascinating but, I admit, not especially useful. Don't you want to know that many basic forms of crowdsourcing were developed in the American Works Progress Administration during the Great Depression? I certainly enjoy knowing that titbit of info, but you may be able to live without it. Certainly you can be a great crowdsourcer without knowing it. That's why such stories are in sidebars. You can skip them if want.

Paragraphs marked with the Technical Stuff icon in the margin are also things you can skip if you want to. This icon marks specialised material that you may not need to know. You can do a lot of crowdsourcing without knowing much about technology. You don't have to make yourself unnecessarily anxious by reading these sections.

One final note: if you're anxious about technical issues, you can completely skip Chapter 16, about workflow, without feeling bad. The ground I cover in this chapter is fascinating but is really useful only to people who are doing cutting-edge microtasking.

Foolish Assumptions

In writing this book, I made the following assumptions about you, the reader:

- ✔ You know something about the current state of the Internet and social media. Certainly, you know about email and probably know something about sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, PayPal and Twitter. You may not use these sites much – I'm okay with that – but you know that they exist and you know what they do.
- ✔ You know something about work and how you organise tasks. You may work in an office – large or small – or be part of a non-profit organisation, or you may work for yourself. However, you know how to take a job, think about the resources that you need to do it and then actually do the job.
- ✔ You know a little bit about economics. You don't have to know much, but you do have to know the basic ideas of supply and demand. Check yourself on this little example. If you want to hire someone for a job, you'll get more people applying for the position if you offer a high wage for the work than if you offer a low wage. You understand that, right? Good. Then you're fine with this book.

I had wanted to assume that you were deeply interested in the historical and cultural influences on crowdsourcing and how crowdsourcing is part of the great trends of industrial society. My editor, however, convinced me that I was misguided to make that assumption, so I didn't. (However, if you are interested in historical and cultural influences, there's a lovely book on the subject called *When Computers Were Human*, by yours truly. It's a great read, but it won't help you become a great crowdsourcer.)

How This Book Is Organised

Because crowdsourcing is a way of organising people, this book is organised in a way that helps you build your organising skill. It moves from simple ideas to the more complex. The book is split into five parts, and each contains several chapters on the part's theme. Here is an overview of the parts.

Part I: Understanding Crowdsourcing Basics

Do you know what crowdsourcing is? Do you know how it differs from using social media? Or mob rule? To help, the first two chapters of Part I give you an overview of the material in the rest of *Crowdsourcing For Dummies*. Chapter 1 gives you an introduction to crowdsourcing and helps you understand the potential benefits of crowdsourcing to you, to your work and to any organisation that may want to use crowdsourcing. Chapter 2 guides you into the rest of the book. It offers an introduction to the different forms of crowdsourcing and then points you to the parts of the book that will be of most use to you.

I also include chapters on how to be a crowdworker. Being a working member of the crowd for a while is a great way to learn more about crowdsourcing – and you can earn money while you do it, too.

Part II: Looking at the Different Forms of Crowdsourcing

Part II divides crowdsourcing into its five basic forms – crowdcontests, crowdfunding, macrotasking, microtasking and self-organised crowds – and provides a thorough introduction to each. Each chapter includes a detailed description of one type of crowdsourcing along with examples that illustrate how to apply it. You may only read one or two of these chapters, because you may want to use only one or two forms of crowdsourcing.

Part III: Building Skill

Part III helps you to develop your skills as a crowdsourcer. It offers a chapter on each of the steps you need to take in order to crowdsource. You may not need to read all of these chapters thoroughly, because you may already possess some of these skills, but you can use them to ensure that you have the basic skills to be a good crowdsourcer.

Chapter 14 is an important chapter, because it deals with the basic ideas for managing crowdsourcing. And in Chapter 15, I look at the idea of *continuous improvement*, where you always try to identify the weak parts of your work and take steps to make them better in future.

Part IV: Getting All You Can Get from the Crowd

Part IV presents some advanced topics, such as microtask workflow, large-scale data gathering, prediction markets, election monitoring and innovation crowdsourcing. Many of these topics are becoming more and more common and are increasingly easy to do.

Part V: The Part of Tens

The Part of Tens illustrates the current state of crowdsourcing. It presents innovative crowdsourcing platforms, best practices, success stories and worst practices. The chapters in this part are filled with stories about crowdsourcing. Some will be familiar. Some will be new to you. They're all here to help you understand both the strengths and weaknesses of crowdsourcing, the techniques that work well and those that don't.

Icons Used in This Book



To help you understand crowdsourcing better and to guide you along the way, this book contains icons in the margins that flag different pieces of information:

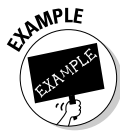
This icon identifies suggestions and tips that make crowdsourcing easier.



When you see this icon, expect issues that need special attention, or problems that can easily get you into trouble. You ignore them at your own risk.



I use this icon to identify an important point that's worth remembering.



This icon highlights stories that illustrate the ideas in each chapter and demonstrate how you can use them. All examples are based on real stories of real people who use crowdsourcing. Some people have allowed me to use their name and the name of their company. You can identify these by the fact that they have full names and real URLs associated with them. For others, I've camouflaged the source of the example. If an example begins 'Emily started crowdsourcing when she ran a flower shop in Livosk', you can be sure that the source of this story is not named Emily, she doesn't sell flowers and has never been to Livosk.



Paragraphs with this icon are intended for people with experience in IT. You can skip the information and still understand the basic ideas of crowdsourcing.



This icon marks sections that deal with material that's used only for the form of crowdsourcing called microtasking. You can skip the paragraph if you're doing some other form of crowdsourcing, such as crowdcontests.

Where to Go from Here

Chapter 1 is a must-read to get a basic grasp of what crowdsourcing is all about, and Chapter 2 gives you an overview of the different forms of crowdsourcing. From there, you can jump to Part II, where you find detailed descriptions of these different forms. The chapters in that part give you more information about becoming a crowdsourcer.

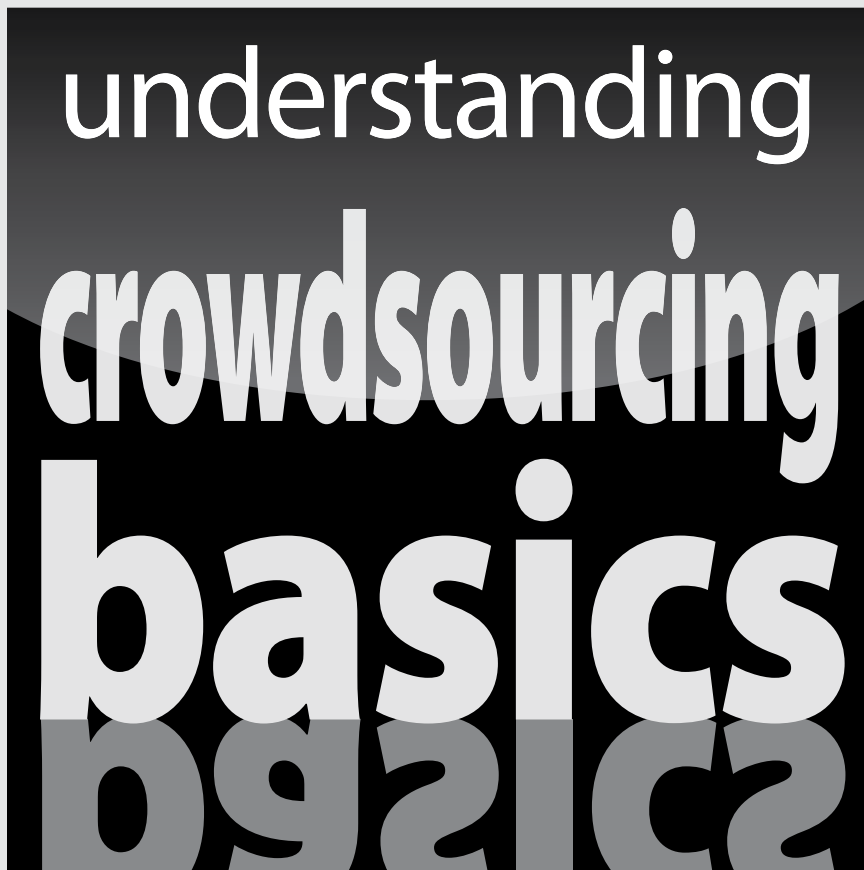
After you've identified the form of crowdsourcing that you're going to do, head to Part III. There, chapters give you the information that you need to design the job, get it posted and running, and evaluate the results.

Alternatively, you can jump around the book as you like, reading whatever chapter appeals. Use the table of contents to help you navigate your own path. Alongside your reading, I recommend browsing some crowdsourcing websites – you can find examples in Chapter 13.

If you think that you're ready to become a crowdsourcer, take the next step. Turn the page, and start the journey.

Part I

Understanding Crowdsourcing Basics



For Dummies can help you get started with lots of subjects. Visit www.dummies.com to learn more and do more with *For Dummies*.

In this part . . .

- ✓ Bone up on the basics and benefits of crowdsourcing to see what it could do for you and your organisation.
- ✓ Meet the five different types of crowdsourcing and understand the rules that govern how they operate.
- ✓ See the inside view on crowdsourcing and gain valuable experience by becoming a working member of the crowd.
- ✓ Enjoy working in the crowd? Fancy joining a crowdmarket? Want to consider the options open to you? Get the lowdown here on crowdsourcing careers.

Chapter 1

People Power: Getting a Feel for Crowdsourcing

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding the basics of crowdsourcing
 - ▶ Seeing the benefits of crowdsourcing
 - ▶ Joining the crowd as a crowdworker
 - ▶ Following the steps to being a crowdsourcer
-

You've probably heard about crowdsourcing. If you haven't, you probably won't be leafing through the pages of this book. However, you may not be aware of the many ways in which you can use crowdsourcing to your advantage or of how crowdsourcing is a powerful way of doing work, organising people, gathering information and raising money.

Many people – the unconverted – think that crowdsourcing is nothing more than putting a question on Facebook and waiting for your friends to answer. Yet it's much more than that – and much more powerful.

I can think of no better example of the power of crowdsourcing than what it has done to the encyclopaedia. Putting together an encyclopaedia was once a grand scholarly activity to organise the knowledge of a nation. The French created the first in the 18th century. The British followed with *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in the nineteenth, and the Americans with the *Encyclopaedia Americana* in the twentieth. Now, in the 21st century, they've all been replaced with a crowdsourced encyclopaedia: Wikipedia. Just think about what crowdsourcing could do for you.

In this chapter, I introduce you to crowdsourcing – how it works, the benefits it offers and how you can think about organising the crowd to help you – and the areas that I cover in this book.

What Is This Thing Called Crowdsourcing?

Crowdsourcing is a means of organising and coordinating the labour of individual human beings. You use the Internet and computer software to contact individuals, offer them things to do, and collect the results of their work.

Seeing how crowdsourcing works

Crowdsourcing requires four different elements:

- ✓ A person, usually called the *crowdsourcer*, who manages the process
- ✓ A group of people, called the *crowd*, who do work
- ✓ A market, usually called the *crowdmarket*, that's used to help manage the contributions of the crowd (crowdmarkets are often found on Internet sites that are called *crowdsites* or *platforms*)
- ✓ A means of communicating with the crowd – usually the Internet

Strictly speaking, you can crowdsource without the Internet. You need to have only the crowdsourcer, the crowd and the crowdmarket. However, you can raise a larger crowd most easily if you use the Internet. The Internet reduces the isolation caused by geography and allows you to contact more people, who may have a wider range of skills.

To crowdsource, you put a request on a crowdmarket. You ask for a piece of information, an idea for a new product, a little bit of work, a large task or even a contribution. In return, you offer some kind of compensation. You pay for the worker's services with money, or you offer him gratitude, or give him a gift, or offer him membership in a community.



Just because you may not use conventional money in the transactions doesn't mean that you have no crowdmarket. Even when they're volunteers, workers receive something in the transaction. They get satisfaction from using their skills, pleasure at being part of a group, or a sense of meaning from contributing to something bigger than themselves.

In one of the most well-known examples of crowdsourcing, Wikipedia, almost all the workers are volunteers and work for no payment. Yet they're part of an exchange at a market. They offer their contributions to the Wikipedia encyclopaedia and receive no money in compensation for their efforts, even if their words becomes a fixture in the encyclopaedia. Still, each person feels some kind of satisfaction at contributing to the well-used compendium of human knowledge.

Looking at crowdsourcing forms

Crowdsourcing can take many different forms. You can do it with large groups of people or small teams, or even with individuals. You can crowdsource with people who live near to you or those who live and work on the other side of the planet. With crowdsourcing, you can engage the creativity and intellectual powers of individuals, or you can engage their physical labour, or you can ask for money.

To understand the nature of crowdsourcing and all that it can do, consider the following examples. I indicate the type of crowdsourcing used in each example; for an overview, take a look at Chapter 2.

- ✔ **Creating the best design:** You're preparing an annual report for your organisation. You've written all the text you need but you want it organised with a nice graphic design. You post on a crowdsite or platform a request for proposals for a design for your report. The crowd members submit proposals. You choose the one that best suits your needs and compensate the individual who created it. This form of crowdsourcing is called a *crowdcontest* (see Chapter 5 for more).
- ✔ **Getting a little help with editing:** Every now and then, you write a small article for a professional periodical. You know that your articles would be better if someone edited them. You don't have enough work to hire a professional editor, and so you post a request on a crowdsite for an editor. You find one who meets your needs and hire him to do your editing. This type of crowdsourcing is called *macrotasking* (flick to Chapter 7 for more).
- ✔ **Setting up a new blog:** You need a new blog for your organisation but you don't know how to set up the software. You also need a few special things that aren't usually part of standard blogging software. You describe what you need, post the details on a crowdmarket and ask for bids, and then you choose the ones that best meet your need. This process is called *macrotasking* (the subject of Chapter 7).
- ✔ **Gathering contact details:** You're the marketing manager for a small company and have just been given a list of 10,000 companies that might be potential clients. This list includes no contact information. To get the email address and URL for each firm, you could put the list on a crowdsourcing site and ask members of the crowd for the details. This form of crowdsourcing is called *microtasking*, and is common (head to Chapter 8 for details).
- ✔ **Converting medical records:** You've just finished medical school, passed your exams and are about to take over your Uncle Enda's practice, but here's the problem: your uncle kept all his patient records on paper forms. He kept detailed notes, but they were all in his tiny, slightly messy handwriting. You can either transcribe all his records yourself or hire a consultant to do it for you. Alternatively, you could also divide the records into tiny parts, put each part on a crowdmarket and ask the

crowd to transcribe the information. This latter solution is called *micro-tasking* (see Chapter 8) – a technique that has become a common way of transcribing handwritten records.

- ✓ **Creating a new product:** You've an idea for a new product but you don't know how to make it, how you can market it or even whether you've got the perfect design. You go to a crowdsite that specialises in innovation and post your idea there. First, you get suggestions from the crowd for improving the product. Next, you get ideas that can help you manufacture the product. Finally, the crowd helps you identify an organisation that can help market the final invention. You're doing a form of *self-organised crowdsourcing*, a type of crowdsourcing that's been around for years (refer to Chapter 9).
- ✓ **Testing new software:** You've created a mobile app but you need to test it to make sure that it works on all kinds of phones, in every different region. To test it, you go to a crowdmarket that specialises in software testing. Members of the crowd download the app, test it in their region, and give you a report. This form of crowdsourcing can be handled by either *microtasking* or *macrotasking*. Either way, it can be very effective and profitable (see Chapters 7 and 8).
- ✓ **Raising funds for a good cause:** You run a community organisation and want to convert an abandoned car park into a flea market. You need money to buy the land and to erect a shed in one corner. While you may try to raise money through conventional means, you can also do it through crowdsourcing. You post your request on a website and ask for small donations. In doing so, you're *crowdfunding*. (There's more on this kind of crowdsourcing in Chapter 6.)



This form of crowdfunding is *charitable* crowdfunding. The donors expect nothing (or just a gift) in return. A second form of crowdfunding, *equity* crowdfunding, allows people to give money to companies and get a stake in the company in return.

- ✓ **Solving a big problem:** You're a company or a charity or just a wealthy person who wants to do some good. You're aware of a problem that touches every member of the human race and yet that no one can solve: a dreadful disease, perhaps; an uncontrollable pollution; a desperate poverty. You would like to see the problem solved, so you create a crowdcontest that seeks a solution. You offer a large prize and publicise the activity. As people start working on the problem, you encourage those with good ideas to work together. This form of crowdsourcing is called *innovation crowdsourcing* or *self-organised crowdsourcing* (see Chapters 9 and 18).
- ✓ **Organising a collection:** After Aunt Emily and Uncle Jared die, you discover that they collected photographs, and had thousands of images stored in boxes that were stuffed into their basement. You recognise a few faces or an occasional vista, but you're unable to identify anything in the remaining photographs or put these pictures into any kind of order. You can identify the images by putting them on a website and

asking the crowd to give you information. You can then hire members of the crowd to process the information and put it into order. This is a type of *microtasking*, one that can be done in sophisticated ways. (Find out more about it in Chapters 8 and 16.)

Creating an encyclopaedia. Finding missing people. Folding proteins. Transcribing medical records. Collecting price information. Identifying sales contacts. Running errands. Deciding whether a web page is offensive. Checking the tone of translated text. Answering a question that has stumped you. All these are examples of crowdsourcing.

Considering Why People Crowdsources

You may find a few people out there who are interested in crowdsourcing because it seems to be something new and interesting to do with the Internet, but novelty and technology are never great reasons to do anything. Most people crowdsources simply because of the advantages it offers them. It brings new talent to organisations, enables individuals to do things that they couldn't do before, and allows groups of people to meet and collaborate for their common good. Crowdsourcing is a way of expanding what anyone or any group can do.

Introducing three key strengths

You get different benefits from crowdsourcing, depending on who you are and what you're doing. However, most people who crowdsources are expecting to get at least one of three things. They're looking for:

- ✓ **Access to talent:** Many people crowdsources to get access to talent that they can't get in any other way. They not be able to find anyone who is an expert app programmer, or knows how to translate French into Urdu, or knows how to optimise a web page in order to get the best ranking on search engines. Crowdsourcing can help you find individuals who have these skills. It can also bring you the talent that comes from the collected intelligence of the crowd, the ability to do things that are difficult for machines to do. For example, crowds are good at recognising handwriting or identifying faces in photographs, or comparing the quality of writing.
- ✓ **Doing more with less:** Crowdsourcing allows you to do more with your resources. You hire the best person for each job rather than looking for a single person with multiple talents. If you're building a bilingual web page, you don't have to look for a web designer who knows two languages. You can crowdsources one person or team for the task of building the web page. You can crowdsources another team or individual for the task of writing the text in a different language.

- ✔ **Greater flexibility:** Crowdsourcing allows you to follow trends in the market. It lets you replace rigid organisational structures with simple, flexible processes. Say that you've an office that processes email. Rather than creating a large staff with fixed rules, you can give some of the work to the crowd and let individuals decide the best way to process the material and find the information you need.

Benefitting from crowdsourcing

Anyone can benefit from crowdsourcing. Crowdsourcing expands your capability, giving access to new skills and abilities. It allows you to hire people when you need them and to get exactly the skills that you need at any given time. The following types of crowdsourcer in particular find crowdsourcing beneficial:

- ✔ **Small businesses:** Crowdsourcing offers skills that small businesses can't easily get any other way. A new business, for example, can use crowdsourcing to stay small and minimise the demands on its capital. You may not have the need for a full-time marketer, but you can get professional marketing skills for each project when you need them. You may not have the need for a full-time finance officer, but you can get financial advice through crowdsourcing.
- ✔ **Large businesses:** Large businesses often look at crowdsourcing as a way of reducing costs. That's one reason for enterprises to use crowdsourcing, but this reason is often not the best. Large companies often have other ways of minimising the cost of doing business. However, large enterprises should consider using crowdsourcing, because it can make them more creative and more responsive to the market. They can use crowds to do things that they used to think impossible, such as to handle large amounts of data in a personalised way, or get detailed contact information for their sales staff, or adjust their web materials to better engage the market.
- ✔ **Non-profit organisations:** Non-profit organisations often need specialised skills that they can't find or can't afford. They have to rely on a volunteer for bookkeeping, the friend of a neighbour to design a presentation, the goodwill of the local computer store to create and maintain a web page. Crowdsourcing enables such organisations to hire people with specialised skills on a short-term basis or to use inexpensive services that provide the skills they need.
- ✔ **Expanding the power of artists:** Artists can use crowdsourcing to expand their role and capacity. Crowdsourcing can offer skills that artists didn't learn in art school and services that they can't provide for themselves. It can give them access to funds through crowdfunding, to collaborators who can expand their art, to business and marketing skills that they couldn't otherwise afford and give them a way of promoting their art to bigger audiences.