

Four Strategic Advantages of Crowdsourcing Creative

And Four Myths You
Should Let Go Now

Executive Summary

Crowdsourcing for creative work (design, copy, concepts, graphic arts and video) has become an essential part of the modern day marketing ecosystem. Several platforms are available, most offering a range of extended and integrated services. The primary value associated with creative crowdsourcing has historically been economic—that is, a lower cost for an end product that fulfills a practical need.

In this article, I'll discuss four crowdsourcing myths that have generated misunderstandings about what creative crowdsourcing can (and has) accomplished; I'll also identify and discuss four key strategic levers creative crowdsourcing provides, and offer a link to a brief gallery of video examples drawn from Tongal's experience, to illuminate each lever.

These are the four levers we'll discuss:

- Speed
- Scale
- Authenticity
- Abundance



Yes, you can still get user generated content through a crowdsourcing platform—and some campaigns are a great fit for that—but you can also get work that rivals the best work done by the biggest agencies in the world.

First Things First: Debunking Crowdsourcing Myths

Myth One: It's New, Untested, and Risky

Actually, crowdsourcing goes back a long way. Long before Wikipedia changed the meaning of the term “encyclopedia,” the Oxford English Dictionary was compiled with the help of the British populace via the OED Reading Programme. You’re thinking 1950s maybe?

Try 1857.

And while most of us think of Charles Lindbergh as an icon of individual daring, his flight to Paris was undertaken to win an incentive competition. Pursuit of the \$25,000 Orteig Prize cost six men their lives, but it also occasioned massive investment in aviation engineering and innovation for which Lindbergh, and all of us, have been the benefactors.

There’s no doubt that the full-flowering of crowdsourced capability and talent has become a potent force in the past five years or so, as the development of Internet platforms for sharing skills, insight, labor, and creativity have become increasingly prevalent. And just as with Lindbergh, risk has been radically reduced (even more rapidly in this case) because platforms for creative work have become increasingly sophisticated in meeting advertising clients’ demands: visibility, control and executional oversight. There’s even a calculated level of redundancy (several sets of eyes on any given output) that, in my opinion, has actually made crowdsourced creative less risky than the traditional methods.

Myth Two: Creative Crowdsourcing = User-Generated Content

While these terms are not mutually exclusive, many tend to think they’re equivalent, and that’s a profound underestimation of the global creative talent pool and its capabilities. Outside the world of marketing creative, crowdsourcing is fueling technology, analytics, medicine, genetics, higher and technical education, and yes, even rocket science. (See our friends at the XPRIIZE for more on that.) And the level of skill available for creative crowdsourcing is no different. Yes, you can still get user generated content through a

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crowdsourcing platform—and some campaigns are a great fit for that—but you can also get work that rivals the best work done by the biggest agencies in the world. Tongal ran a competition to source short films for Sundance in 2014 and placed SEVEN of them in the competition. No doubt about it, the talent is out there. And by out there, I mean everywhere.

Myth Three: Crowdsourced Talent is Inferior

Truth be told, many of the people and studios that agencies use are also working on crowdsourced platforms. And this is a trend I would not expect to slow down any time soon. There's a significant attraction for creative people to work as they choose to work; the abundance of challenging projects on elective platforms allows them to raise their hands only for projects they feel a strong connection and affinity for. And global accessibility also enables them to work when they have the capacity to give their best effort. If you know creative people, you know how important that is to them, perhaps especially so to the most talented of them.

We've had several great filmmakers on our platform tell us that the best thing about it is that it gives them the freedom to do their best work. It's certainly light-years away from a world where creatives had to develop an entire portfolio based on frozen foods or kid's beverages. Increasingly, when you're tapping only into traditional sources, you're working with folks who have settled in to that confining model.

Myth Four: Creative Crowdsourcing is Strictly a "Resourcing" Alternative

Perhaps it's that word stuck in there: sourcing—but the idea seems to persist that creative crowdsourcing is strictly about getting "equal" or "good enough" results at a much lower cost.

Part of this bias likely comes from successful crowdsourcing venues with names like *Fiverr* and *99designs*. (Yes, "99" promises a large selection of designs, but it also implies a price point, or at the very least someone who knows your department is on the hook for squeezing every dollar.) *Airbnb* and *Uber* have also made it clear that where there is an abundance of resources, prices will be lower. However, both offer an experience that's qualitatively different and,



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for many people, significantly better. (I count myself among those who would use Uber even if it was more expensive than an L.A. cab.) Abundance for creative has that same effect—bringing other benefits that, in combination with lower price point, translate into higher order, strategic value.

The Four Strategic Levers of Creative Crowdsourcing

As you'll soon see, these strategic levers are intimately interconnected and support one another. I'll do my best to make those interconnections clear as we move from section to section. Also, after describing each lever, I'll provide a link to a gallery of work that shows how these value drivers have come alive for several brands Tongal has worked with.

Speed

Speed is another one of those terms that also gets chewed up in bad and stubborn metaphors. One still hears the adage that work can be done cheaper, faster, or better—pick two. There's also the fact that the need for speed is very often a result of poor planning and comes accompanied by personal (or departmental) guilt, as in, "Your lack of planning doesn't constitute an emergency," and other similar sentiments.

Speed has also been mythologized on the benefit side of the scale as well. Ever since *Oreo* conquered the Super Bowl Twitter-sphere with, "It's okay to dunk in the dark," there's a sense—at least in Marketing Blog land—that light-speed is the only speed that matters.

But the deeper value of speed as a strategic asset is the way it helps you accept and strategically leverage the new reality of a daily quickening of the creative pace. There's no doubt that conversation in general moves faster than ever due to our hyper-connectedness, and this is perhaps especially true in marketing environments. If you've done more than dip your toes in the content marketing world,

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you've seen just how quickly the moment passes to make your original and substantive contribution to any conversation taking place in the here and now—especially before somebody else takes the words right out of your mouth. No doubt about it: staying current is a full-time job.

And of course your brand is no longer just making a new TVC every four months. If you're doing it right, the tempo has picked up, and you're making something NEW in the world at least bi-weekly. You're also not simply “broadcasting” anymore—you're responding to what you hear, and that means working much faster.

Crowdsourcing creative, on a market-tested and proven platform like Tongal, can increase your output speed significantly. It's also a great way to balance talking with listening. Because when you crowdsource creative, you will hear from your best customers, your target customers and even your competitors' customers.

And the *abundance* we've mentioned as a fourth lever—the number of highly skilled participants available for any creative project—is also part of what drives that speed. Because even if you ask for deadlines that would be considered an affront to your traditional suppliers, in Crowd Land there will be several talented candidates for whom the opportunity window fits perfectly. It's all about the numbers. Or it starts there anyway.

Speed also comes from leveraging the crowd to break work down into component pieces. Turns out that Henry Ford's insight into faster methods for building cars—perhaps especially the sub-assembly of complex, multi-part components—works great for creative projects as well. This method enables crowdsourced creative platforms to create whole campaigns in the space of time typically required to develop a single spot.



SPEED: Watch a brief highlight video shot when Tongal fielded a tech crew for Lenovo World in a mere 48 hours — and a few other Speed-related miracles for Oreo, Honey Maid, and others.



Scale

Scale, being a long-time favorite buzzword in business class, means many different things to different people. In general, I'd like to emphasize the following aspects of scale as it relates to creative crowdsourcing.

Scale Means Reach. Geographic, demographic, psychographic, experience, skills—when you're working with a talent pool that covers the globe and spans all walks of life, you can make connections wherever and with whomever you need. The growth of our creative community has been fueled primarily by the organic responses to the requests of our clients and customers. And as our customers have grown more familiar with the global reach of our community, they've continued to challenge our community to connect and grow. As a result, we have feet on the street in cities all over the globe.

Precision in Targeting Both Talent and Audience. When we talk about scale, it's important to bear in mind that our frame of reference is exponential. With a creative bench 100,000+ strong (and the aforementioned global reach) you can find exactly the talent profile or team you're looking for—whatever that profile might be. As we like to put it, "The needle in the haystack can find you."

This kind of flexibility assures that brands can get precisely what they need without paying extra freight merely to engage for resources.

If you need to find creative angles or stories suited for young urban moms or outdoor enthusiasts who drive a specific brand of car, why not work with them?

Cost Specificity. Creative from crowdsourcing platforms can scale efficiently for everything from generating a single tagline to creating a long-lasting, multi-spot campaign. This kind of flexibility assures that brands can get precisely what they need without paying extra freight merely to engage for resources.



SCALE: See how Naked Juice used Tongal scale to quickly source stories and video in 10 cities across the country. Tongal's work for Johnson's Baby, Shutterstock, and Gillette is also featured.



Authenticity

Maybe you have this friend too: just a little bit deaf about one subject: themselves—and therefore prone, on occasion, to go on a little bit too long about precisely that subject.

If you don't have that friend, I'm guessing you know a few brands that fit the description? Maybe your brand is one of those who've fallen into this unfortunate social habit?

It certainly is a hard habit to break. Especially when the backbone of commercial interaction for several decades running has been brands talking to an audience—yes, almost exclusively, about themselves. But every other personal interaction has become bi-



or multi-directional. Blame the Internet. Blame YouTube. Blame your smartphone. But make no mistake, that's where we are. It's certainly one of the main reasons "authenticity" is such a hot ticket these days.

Authenticity is actually a strategic strength from crowdsourcing that we at Tongal discovered more than planned for. We built our platform and our community first and foremost to give talented people opportunity, and knew that by doing so we'd be leveraging abundance, get scale and speed, and bring the multiple benefits of all of these to our clients. What we didn't realize was that we were also creating a platform and method for tapping into free-range authenticity.

But that's exactly what happened.

Real People Respond to...Other Real People. One thing we've witnessed time and time again is that there are many narratives of interest to customers that are much more entertaining—and effective—when customers are doing the talking. Personal customer stories and testimony are not the only way to achieve authenticity, but they're remarkably consistent. Customer-originated narratives are also an abundant resource that's essentially impossible to run dry. The trick (and a good platform and team can help you with this) is how to tap into them and also take authenticity uptown—well above and beyond the overfilled shelves of user-generated content.

"...But Nobody Really Loves Our Brand." Like that friend who talks about himself a little bit more than he ought, there seems to be a common psychological condition among brand marketers—let's call it a lack of "brand self-confidence." Maybe it comes from the crumbling tradition of one-way brand communication and the shocking recognition that many are contending with every day now—you really can't *buy* an audience anymore, you have to earn one. What's more, you have to earn attention to even keep the audience you have.

We've also seen "brand jealousy" play a role: it's hard to escape the feeling that the brand on the other side of the fence is cooler and

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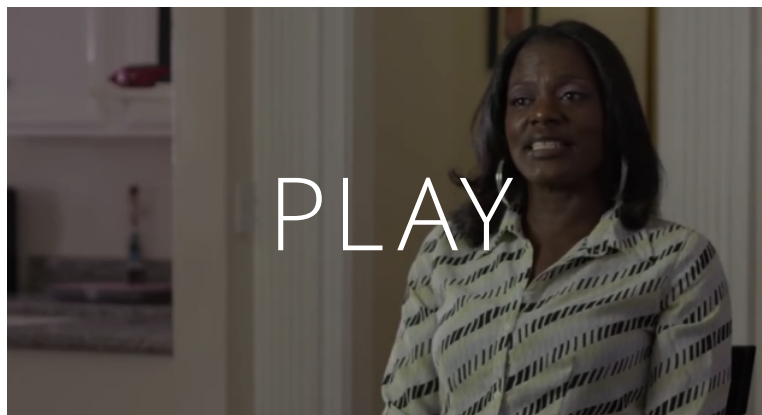
hipper than yours. In any case, it's not uncommon for us to have to work through self-doubt with clients who are approaching creative crowdsourcing for the first time.

Regarding jealousy, we've had the pleasure of working with some brands and franchises that are, for all intents and purposes, adored: LEGO, American Girl, Star Wars, and The Twilight Saga to name just a few. But we've also seen incredible results—and huge community responses—for brands of all levels of exposure and relative popularity. We think there are three main reasons for this:

- **You're more beloved than you know:** Almost all brands play a bigger role in people's lives than brand personnel are generally aware. You spend so much time looking for new customers, new angles, new creative that your equity is often less apparent to you than it is to your best customers. (Brand research firms have paid their mortgages via this gap for decades now.)
- **Connection occurs “outside your walls.”** The deeper wellspring of emotional connection begins precisely where customers connect with your products—which is to say, outside the walls of your organization.
- **Creative “attitude” matters most:** By far the biggest variable we see in participation isn't “brand,” it's the nature of the creative challenge. And there's more good news on this wavelength: it turns out that the kind of content that people like to make is—almost invariably—the kind of content people want to read, listen to, watch, and share, share, share. If we had to describe it in one word, we might say: human, irreverent, touching, fun, or unexpected. But we could just give in and call it what everybody else is calling it these days: *authentic*.



AUTHENTICITY: Meet and be inspired by authentic people like Shylise, who helped Quicken Loans promote the idea of being brave about homeownership. You'll also see authenticity examples from several other brands.



Abundance

So we end where it really all begins, with perhaps the most abstract and high-level source for strategic value derived from creative crowdsourcing: abundance.

One way to think about creative abundance is to simply think about your own experience with the creative world(s) you love. If you grew up hanging around a record or video store, or your town had a great library, you may remember a time when you could at least entertain the illusion it was possible to know “everything,” or, more conservatively, “everything worth knowing” about your passion: whether it was photography, garage rock, detective novels, modern classical composers, American poetry, or B-movies.

Well, we can forget all that now. Because even for the most devoted fan and the slenderest genre, the days of knowing anywhere near “everything worth knowing” are long gone. The reason for that is abundance. Abundance and availability of talent, tools, information and knowledge, mentoring, time, and access. And while that super-plurality of talent is daunting for anyone who wishes to be a critic or a self-styled member of the cognoscenti, it’s great news for those of us who work with creative people—and even greater news for those of us who work in marketing. That’s because it helps us get our work done, faster, better—and for a lot less.

The trick is accessing abundance, structuring and understanding it, curating it efficiently, then shaping it precisely to your purpose. Here’s the good news: with a partner like Tongal, most of that



the
DISCOVERY.

Crowdsourcing allows you to get out of your own way, creatively speaking. Getting exposure from dozens to hundreds of outside ideas means you'll see common thoughts as well as new ones—and then bring the very best ideas to the front.

organizational and procedural work will be done for you, leaving you free to focus on the fun, important, and strategic stuff—the creative.

Abundance Means More Than a Lower Cost. No doubt about it—saving money is fun. But the consistent theme we hear from our clients is that the real joy of creative crowdsourcing is the abundance of creativity itself. The positive business impact of this abundance is so consistent we've even given it a name; we call it *creative discovery*.

Creative Discovery. There are good reasons traditional agencies typically present three or four main ideas for any campaign or execution. They're offering expertise; so the creative resource is limited, by design, because the value the organization is bringing to you is their insight, informed by their knowledge of your space, your target, your brand's positioning and philosophy, and their skill within their specialized discipline. For all of those reasons, any agency that brings you 200 ideas isn't really doing its job.

But it's not the least bit unusual for our community to submit 500 to 1,000 ideas or stories for a given creative challenge. We do this on purpose; by keeping the opening ideation phases for our projects very brief. For many projects, we limit an idea to a tweet length of 140 characters. For stories, we'll stretch it to 500. You can call them ideas, seeds, or bolts of inspiration, but the breadth of thinking that's brought to bear changes the way one thinks about the creative process. This is how you find the common threads of thought and the outliers with a spark of genius all in one go.

Here are some of the additional benefits this kind of abundance brings:

- **You can “get out of your own way”** and see and hear ideas you would never otherwise encounter. Dozens of them. Hundreds, even. This is the most consistent benefit we hear from both new and repeat customers.
- **You get a robust mix of perspectives.** In a large set of ideas, you'll be able to see common patterns of response as well as brilliant ideas that stand apart. Insight from both can guide your

way forward. We've seen phrases that are repeated in hundreds of responses magically transformed into campaign taglines. When people tell you loud and clear where their heads are at, sometimes the smartest thing to do is meet them there.

- **You can let the community curate for you.** Yes, there's work to do to get from several hundred seed ideas to the three or four you love most, but as you go through that process you can employ the community who created the ideas to help you find the ones that resonate most. The curation process is a more efficient kind of testing because it's also a creative process, and suggestions and recommendations keep coming to take ideas from good to great. (The abundance train is always rolling.)
- **You can generate enough material for a campaign in the same timeframe that you would normally commit to a single spot.** Yes, that definitely sounds like "speed" fueled by creative abundance.
- **You can activate your audience.** Inviting lots of people to play with your brand creatively is a great way to energize or re-energize your brand. If you're not involved in a creative dialogue with your customers and your competitors are, I think it's safe to say you *will* lose ground. Especially if your target includes millennials. And pretty soon, everyone's target will.
- **You'll find out who loves your brand and how much—and what it means to them.** Crowdsourcers don't (and shouldn't) offer themselves up as researchers. But through many years of experience with this process, I'm convinced that there's a kind of truth that shows up in creative challenges that isn't easy to get to in focus groups or surveys. You may not be able to troubleshoot your brand or marketing via a continuous creative dialogue with your customers, but you can definitely find, define, or refine your North star.



ABUNDANCE: Sam's Club / Member's Mark rolled with the laughs and saw abundance: with 24M views, they became the only digital advertiser to crash the 2016 Super Bowl ad rankings. Watch this video and see more examples from General Mills, Ricola and Google Play.



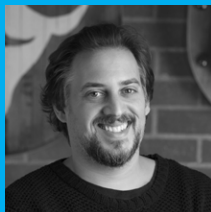
Summing Up: It's Different For Every Brand

We hope you can take the time to look at the illustrative galleries of videos for each of the four major strategic levers described above. First and foremost the work is fun and impressive — but it should also convincingly answer the sometimes unstated question; “Yeah but is crowdsourced creative any good?” We’re quite happy to let you be the judge of that...

The galleries might also help establish a subtler point, which is that these value drivers manifest themselves in different ways for different companies. This may be the final and most impressive benefit of creative abundance. There’s no formula per se — per brand, per project: there’s always some new twist to discover. Which is really what makes the whole process so much fun and so rewarding for everyone involved.



*Want to learn more about the advantages of crowdsourcing creative and how Tongal's platform can meet your content needs? Give us a shout at **(310) 579-9260** or email **info@tongal.com**.*



James De Julio is the co-founder, president and chief product officer at Tongal. His mission is creative populism — empowering people from all over the world to pursue their passions through a collaborative community. Tongal's studio on-demand platform connects businesses with writers, directors and production companies who deliver outstanding creative work. At Tongal, James oversees all creative and platform development, partnering with brands such as LEGO, P&G, Anheuser-Busch InBev, Johnson & Johnson and NASA while building and mentoring Tongal's community of rising filmmakers. As a thought leader for open-innovation alternative work models, he has been featured in *Fast Company*, *AdWeek*, *Mashable*, *Rolling Stone* and more.