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Policy, George Washington University*



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by David Alan Grier

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Crowdsourcing For Dummies®

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Contents at a Glance

.....

<i>Introduction</i>	1
<i>Part I: Understanding Crowdsourcing Basics</i>	7
Chapter 1: People Power: Getting a Feel for Crowdsourcing	9
Chapter 2: Getting to Know the Forms of Crowdsourcing and Crowdmarts	19
Chapter 3: Infiltrating the Crowd	29
Chapter 4: Joining the Crowdforce.....	43
<i>Part II: Looking at the Different Forms of Crowdsourcing</i>	61
Chapter 5: Creating Crowdcontests	63
Chapter 6: Raising Money with Crowdfunding.....	79
Chapter 7: Making Use of Macrotasks.....	99
Chapter 8: Managing with Microtasks.....	125
Chapter 9: Combining the Intelligence of Self-Organised Crowds.....	145
<i>Part III: Building Skill</i>	161
Chapter 10: Engaging the Crowd with Your Project.....	163
Chapter 11: Instructing the Crowd	175
Chapter 12: Crowdsourcing with Social Media	187
Chapter 13: Picking Your Platform	203
Chapter 14: Managing Your Crowd.....	221
Chapter 15: Learning on the Job.....	241
<i>Part IV: Getting All You Can Get from the Crowd</i>	257
Chapter 16: Combining Microtasks and Preparing Workflow	259
Chapter 17: Crowd Reporting: Using the Crowd to Gather Information and News.....	273
Chapter 18: Initiating Innovation	287
Chapter 19: Preparing Your Organisation	309

<i>Part V: The Part of Tens</i>	317
Chapter 20: Following the Future of Crowdsourcing: Ten (Or So)	
Websites to Watch	319
Chapter 21: Ten Best Practices to Adopt.....	329
Chapter 22: Ten Success Stories.....	335
Chapter 23: Ten Crowdsourcing Blunders to Avoid	343
<i>Index</i>	353

Table of Contents

.....

<i>Introduction</i>	1
About This Book	1
Conventions Used in This Book	2
What You're Not to Read	2
Foolish Assumptions	3
How This Book Is Organised	4
Part I: Understanding Crowdsourcing Basics	4
Part II: Looking at the Different Forms of Crowdsourcing	4
Part III: Building Skill	4
Part IV: Getting All You Can Get from the Crowd	5
Part V: The Part of Tens	5
Icons Used in This Book	5
Where to Go from Here	6

Part 1: Understanding Crowdsourcing Basics **7**

Chapter 1: People Power: Getting a Feel for Crowdsourcing **9**

What Is This Thing Called Crowdsourcing?	10
Seeing how crowdsourcing works	10
Looking at crowdsourcing forms	11
Considering Why People Crowdsourc	13
Introducing three key strengths	13
Benefitting from crowdsourcing	14
Considering reliability	15
Being a Crowdworker	16
Becoming a Crowdsourcer	17

Chapter 2: Getting to Know the Forms of Crowdsourcing and Crowdm **19**

Harnessing the Power of Divided Labour	20
Keeping the job whole	20
Splitting the job into big pieces	21
Dividing the job as small as you can	22
Letting the crowd divide the job	23
Using crowdsourcing to raise money	24
Looking at the Rules that Govern How Crowdm	25
Distinguishing between contract and contest markets	27
Understanding collaborative and independent crowdworking	27
Combining the two rules	28

Chapter 3: Infiltrating the Crowd	29
Following the Crowdworke’s Steps.....	30
Taking Lessons from Your Time as a Crowdworke	32
Lesson 1: Crowdworke have name and reputation	32
Lesson 2: Crowds need training.....	33
Lesson 3: Crowds want clear instruction.....	34
Lesson 4: Crowds are free to move	34
Joining the Staff of Wikipedia.....	35
Registering as a worke	35
Choosing a task	36
Completing a task	36
Submitting a task	36
Leaping into the Market with Amazon’s Mechanical Turk.....	37
Registering as a worke	37
Selecting the task.....	38
Qualifying and completing the task.....	39
Donning the White Lab Coat: Zooniverse.....	41
Chapter 4: Joining the Crowdforce	43
Deciding to Join the Crowdforce	44
Considering Your Options	46
Looking at microtask	47
Competing for the contest	48
Lining up for macrotask	48
Wading into self-organised crowds	49
Searching for careers in crowdfunding.....	50
Getting Up and Running on a Macrotask Crowdmart	51
Choosing a mart	51
Setting yourself up on the mart	52
Building your portfolio.....	53
Protecting Yourself as a Macrotasker.....	53
Making the Bid in Macrotasking	54
The proposal	55
The covering letter	55
The résumé.....	57
Setting the price.....	57
Learning from the process.....	58
Completing the Macrotask	58
Remembering the goal	58
Communicate, communicate, communicate.....	59
Working across cultures	59
Keeping good records	60
Getting an extra recommendation.....	60

***Part II: Looking at the Different
Forms of Crowdsourcing* 61**

Chapter 5: Creating Crowdcontests 63

Reaping the Benefits of Crowdcontests.....	63
Deepening understanding.....	64
Faster, better, cheaper.....	65
Understanding Types of Crowdcontest.....	66
Running a Crowdcontest.....	67
Stating the goal.....	68
Writing the rules.....	69
Publicising the results.....	72
Improving the Crowdcontest.....	73
Splitting the contest.....	74
Building a stronger crowd.....	75
Running a series of contests.....	76
Considering an Example: The Business Logo.....	76
Running a logo contest yourself.....	76
Using a contest service to run the contest for you.....	77

Chapter 6: Raising Money with Crowdfunding..... 79

Knowing the Basics of Crowdfunding.....	80
Seeing crowdfunding as a community activity.....	80
Using the crowdmarket.....	81
Deciding between all-or-nothing funding or partial funding.....	82
Understanding the fee.....	83
Running a Crowdfunding Project.....	84
Writing the budget.....	84
Describing your project.....	85
Setting a deadline for a decision.....	86
Contacting the crowd.....	87
Considering an Example: Creating a Playground.....	88
Building a budget.....	89
Writing a letter.....	89
Setting a timeline.....	89
Getting the crowd.....	91
Accumulating Equity for a Company.....	91
Making a pitch.....	92
Using a platform.....	93
Paying the fees and getting the funds.....	93
Attracting the crowd.....	95
Waiting for results.....	96
Examining the results.....	96
Using non-equity funding.....	98

Chapter 7: Making Use of Macrotasks	99
Getting to Grips with Macrotasking	100
Seeing the Benefits of Macrotasks	101
Identifying Macrotasks	103
Thinking process, not organisation	103
Identifying independent tasks	105
Choosing what's important	105
Finding a fixed deadline	106
Requiring special skills	106
Preparing the Macrotask	107
Naming the manager	107
Putting together a statement of work for macrotask workers	108
Beginning the Macrotask	110
Choosing a site	111
Posting the project	111
Inviting workers to your job	112
Choosing a Macrotasker	112
Reading the covering letter	113
Reviewing the proposal	113
Assessing the portfolio	113
Checking the reputation	114
Judging qualifications	114
Interviewing	115
Making the selection	116
Managing the work	117
Protecting intellectual property	118
Ending the Macrotask	118
Paying the macrotasker and closing the books	118
Assessing the experience	119
Considering an Example: Creating an App	119
Checking that your task is a macrotask	120
Writing the statement of work	120
Posting the job	121
Hiring the macrotasker	122
Following the work	122
Ending the macrotask	123
Chapter 8: Managing with Microtasks	125
Identifying Tasks That You Can Microsource	125
Knowing How the Microtasking Process Works	127
Keeping tasks short and simple	127
Creating the basic task	128
Finding the basic data	128
Writing the instructions	130
Pricing the tasks	131

Training and validating workers	132
Checking the results	132
Assembling the work	134
Working through an Example with Mechanical Turk	135
Creating the task	135
Laying out the work	138
Starting with a test run	142
Reviewing the work and retrieving the results	143
Reviewing the prices of your microtasks	144
Chapter 9: Combining the Intelligence of Self-Organised Crowds . . .	145
Getting to Grips with Self-Organised Crowds	146
Determining What You Need the Crowd to Do:	
Information Gathering and Decision Making	147
Gathering information	148
Making a decision	150
Gathering and deciding	150
Designing the Process	151
Finding the crowd	152
Preparing clear rules	153
Motivating the crowd	154
Looking at the results	155
Organising a Prediction Market	156
Finding prediction markets	157
Establishing the rules	158
Laying down the rules	159
Assessing the result	160
 Part III: Building Skill	 161
Chapter 10: Engaging the Crowd with Your Project	163
Getting Started with Crowdfunding	164
Knowing what motivates the crowd	164
Identifying the talent and resources you need	165
Adapting your strategy for public and private crowds	165
Inviting People to Join Your Crowd	166
Seeding the crowd	166
Engaging on YouTube	167
Granting bragging rights	168
Fostering Community Spirit	168
Building an online base	169
Showing how tasks contribute to the overall goal	170
Identifying benefits	170
Updating the crowd on progress	171



Sustaining the Crowd's Interest.....	171
Teaching and Training	172
Showing the outcome.....	172
Leading the crowd through the tasks	173
Engaging on YouTube (again).....	173
Chapter 11: Instructing the Crowd.	175
Preparing the Fundamental Message: Writing a Statement of Work	176
Structuring carefully.....	176
Making clarity your goal	179
Looking at an example statement of work.....	181
Connecting the Kneebone to the Thighbone: Creating Instructions	182
Thinking about who does what to what	183
Deciding the order of instructions	184
Getting Feedback on Your Guidance.....	185
Chapter 12: Crowdsourcing with Social Media	187
Knowing the Benefits and the Limitations of Social Media Crowdsourcing	187
Building a Private Crowd with Social Media	189
Doing Simple Crowdsourcing with Social Media.....	191
Crowdfunding: Fundraising with Facebook.....	191
Macrotasking: Looking for freelancers with LinkedIn.....	192
Crowdcontests: Turning to Twitter	193
Microtasking: Translating via a blog	194
Turning the Process Upside Down: Using a Crowdsourcing Tool	195
Crowdfunding: Going fundraising.....	195
Crowdcontests: Modifying marketing methods.....	196
Microtasking and crowdsurveys: Asking for Opinions on Facebook.....	197
Microtasking: Reading the tweet leaves	198
Recognising the Difference between Social Media and Social Research.....	200
Chapter 13: Picking Your Platform	203
Getting the Benefits of a Platform	204
Raising the crowd	204
Knowing what other people know	205
Using standardised crowdsourced services	205
Getting a helping hand with bookkeeping	207
Cutting the risk factor	208
Finding the Right Crowd	208
Reviewing products	209
Checking out individual portfolios	210
Looking for the Right Support	210
Guiding your project	211
Acting as mediator.....	211
Protecting intellectual property	212

Deciding How Much You Want to Do.....	213
Reading the Fine Print.....	214
Understanding the cost.....	214
Expecting a refund.....	215
Knowing your responsibilities.....	215
Doing a Little Comparison Shopping.....	216
Checking out the contest providers.....	217
Connecting with the macrotaskers.....	217
Looking at options for microtasking.....	217
Finding the best funders.....	219
Chapter 14: Managing Your Crowd.....	221
Starting with the Right Balance of Skills.....	221
Choosing the Right People.....	223
Managing the Crowd Through the Project.....	224
Using a consistent voice.....	224
Keeping in touch.....	225
Tracking milestones.....	226
Giving the crowd space to work.....	227
Respecting Workers' Rights.....	228
Keeping on Top of the Details: Payroll and Accounting.....	229
Incentivising to Build Quality.....	230
Rewarding best practices.....	230
Taking inspiration from gamification.....	231
Recognising Trouble.....	232
Knowing your options.....	233
Computing the price of failure.....	234
Treating the cause, not the symptom.....	234
Stopping a Project.....	234
Exiting firmly and gracefully.....	235
Protecting your intellectual property.....	235
When Crowds Attack: Dealing with Angry Crowds.....	236
Assessing the situation.....	236
Handling a discontented worker.....	237
Recognising structural problems.....	238
Managing the public relations problem.....	239
Chapter 15: Learning on the Job.....	241
Following the Cycle of Continuous Improvement.....	242
Using the Cycle in Crowdsourcing.....	244
Anticipating trouble.....	245
Keeping an eye out for stumbling blocks.....	245
Reading the signs from the crowd.....	249
Handling the Unexpected.....	249
Accepting bad results.....	250
Stopping, revising and restarting.....	250
Demanding a refund.....	251
Paying and trashing.....	252

Lowering the Stakes with a Pilot Run.....	253
Adapting a Crowdfunding Campaign According to Results.....	254
Changing the means and the message.....	255
Changing your platform.....	255
Changing the goal.....	255

Part IV: Getting All You Can Get from the Crowd..... 257

Chapter 16: Combining Microtasks and Preparing Workflow259

Discerning the Difference between Parallel and Serial Microtasks.....	260
Doing the job all at once: Parallel tasks.....	261
Putting one thing after another: Serial tasks.....	262
Minimising Error.....	265
Appreciating the value of serial tasks.....	265
Duplicating parallel tasks.....	266
Working through an Example: Devising Workflow and Making Decisions in Mechanical Turk.....	267
Starting with parallel tasks.....	269
Advancing to serial tasks.....	270
Combining parallel and serial tasks.....	270
Going for Gold: The Many Benefits of Workflow.....	271

Chapter 17: Crowd Reporting: Using the Crowd to Gather Information and News273

Understanding Why People Use Crowd Reporting.....	274
Sorting Eight Billion Stories.....	274
Helping the crowd focus.....	275
Combining amateurs and experts.....	275
Gathering Information Geographically with Ushahidi.....	277
Rallying the crowd to Ushahidi.....	279
Deploying Ushahidi.....	279
Summarising the results.....	280
Getting the Benefits while Avoiding the Perils of Crowd Reporting.....	281
Understanding the nature of the crowd.....	282
Knowing who's talking: The crowd effect.....	284
Knowing what the crowd believes: Gresham's Law.....	285

Chapter 18: Initiating Innovation287

Understanding the Forms of Innovation Crowdsourcing.....	288
Asking for a Little Insight: Classes of Innovation.....	290
Crowdsourcing for novelty.....	290
Crowdsourcing for improvement.....	291
Crowdsourcing for advantage.....	292

Planning for Innovation	292
Planning for new ideas	293
Bringing the unexpected into your plan with a crowdcontest	294
Running with the Right Crowd.....	299
Knowing the different types of crowd.....	299
Matching your plans with the best crowd.....	300
Building New Products and Services with Co-creation	303
Generating ideas and defining products	304
Designing with the crowd	305
Testing, testing, testing.....	305
Giving the product to the world	306
Considering an Example: Restructuring a Business with InnoCentive.....	306
Chapter 19: Preparing Your Organisation	309
Focusing on Crowdsourcing Elements of Processes	310
Planning for the Future	312
Navigating a Trial Run.....	313
Building Commitment	314
Knowing the Limits.....	315
Bracing for the Unknowns	316
 Part V: The Part of Tens	 317
Chapter 20: Following the Future of Crowdsourcing: Ten (Or So) Websites to Watch	319
Discovering the State of Crowdsourcing: Crowdsourcing.org	320
Reading the Morning News: Daily Crowdsourcing	321
Getting the European Perspective: crowdsourcingblog.de	321
Meeting the Leaders: CrowdConf and Crowdopolis	322
Tracking Equity Crowdfunding: Crowdcube and Indiegogo	323
Monitoring the Growth of the Global Crowd: Clickworker and Trabajo.....	324
Expanding the Scope of Crowdcontests: Kaggle	325
Promoting Innovation: AHHHA and Innovation Exchange	326
Building New Microtasking Platforms: MobileWorks and Tagasauris	326
Macrotasking in the Boardroom: 10EQS.....	327
Chapter 21: Ten Best Practices to Adopt	329
Doing Things Step by Step.....	329
Copying What Others Have Done	330
Paying Attention to the Price.....	331
Talking with Your Crowd.....	331

Listening to the Crowd.....	332
Using Social Media.....	332
Publicising Accomplishments.....	333
Bringing the Crowd into the Decisions.....	333
Doing the Same Job Two Ways.....	334
Giving a Gift to the Crowd.....	334
Chapter 22: Ten Success Stories.....	335
Creating the SXSW Festival T-shirt.....	335
Developing Smith & Kraus's Mobile App.....	336
Spending Time with Mr Bentham.....	337
Generating a New Movie Recommendation Method for Netflix.....	338
Building a National Treasure Trove.....	338
Running a Video Campaign for Audio-Technica.....	339
Getting USA Today on Mobile Phones.....	339
Analysing Viruses with Foldit.....	340
Writing Descriptions for Magnum Photos.....	341
Setting Up Coffee Joulie with the Crowd's Backing.....	342
Chapter 23: Ten Crowdsourcing Blunders to Avoid.....	343
Thinking Crowdsourcing Is Easy.....	343
Failing to Review the Work of the Crowd.....	344
Not Knowing Who's in the Crowd.....	345
Failing to Do a Trial Run.....	346
Putting the Crowdsourcing Ahead of the Job.....	347
Losing Your Reputation.....	348
Hiding from the Crowd.....	349
Assuming That All Crowdworkers Understand.....	350
Having Too Much Faith in the Market.....	351
Index.....	353

Introduction

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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 crowdsourcer. 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.

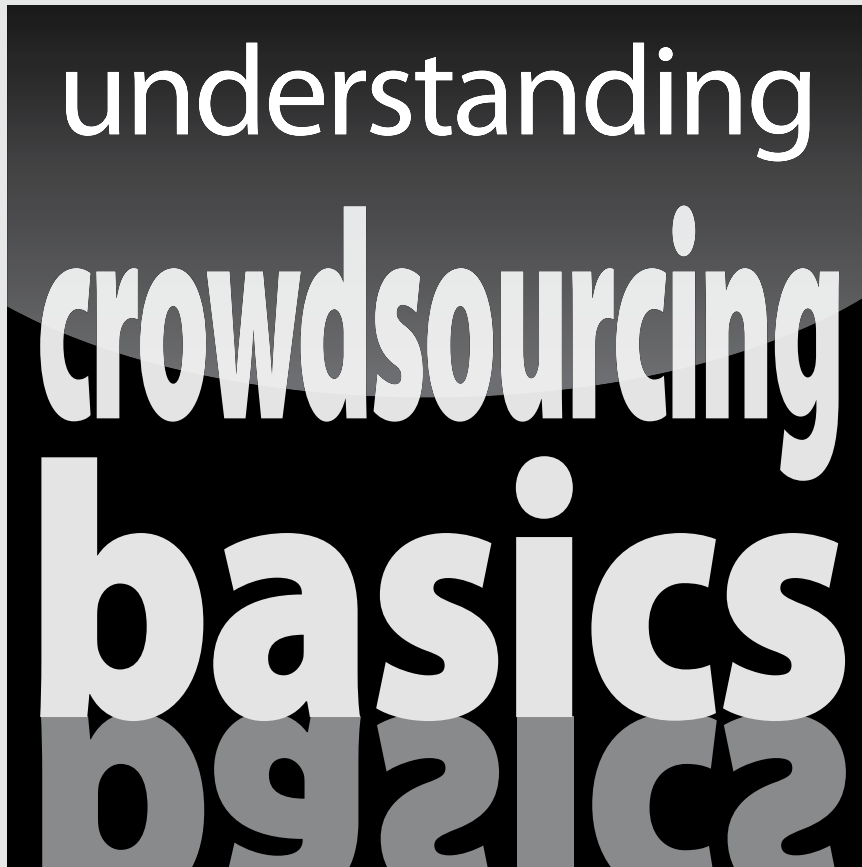
After you've identified the form of crowdsourcing that you're going to do, head to Part III. There, chapters give you the information that you need to design the job, get it posted and running, and evaluate the results.

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.

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