

Uncrowding the Crowd

A New Model Designed to Create Better Working Relationships





Introduction

When organizations first began crowdsourcing to identify talent for specific projects, the concept seemed to offer limitless potential.

Crowdsourcing: The act of taking a job traditionally performed by an employee and outsourcing it to an undefined group of people on a project-by-project basis, in the form of an open call.

Source: Burnt Oak

Like the trends of outsourcing and off-shoring jobs in the early 2000s, organizations that crowdsource projects today are focused on reducing cost and increasing resource flexibility while maintaining quality.¹ This means if you rely on disengaged crowdsourcing you do so at increased risk. Disengaged crowdsourcing is the idea that success, savings and quality can come from the crowd without a relationship - each and every time you go back to that deep well. The potential upside (getting a project completed on the cheap) may be offset by poor results, sub-skilled labor and missed deadlines. The “crowd” as it exists today offers inconsistent outcomes.

This Field Nation whitepaper exposes the importance of “uncrowding the crowd” and how to avoid the pitfalls of crowdsourcing while keeping its benefits and scale. It provides insights and recommendations to help organizations regain their edge when seeking highly skilled labor while maintaining the flexibility, reach and rapid delivery that cloud-based work marketplaces and project management platforms promise.

The Challenge of Crowdsourcing

Organizations that crowdsource projects face problems like cost overruns and unskilled labor that can't complete projects on time – or at all.

Field Nation enables project managers to identify skilled resources whether in their organizations or in the crowd, who understand how to communicate and complete on-site work quickly and effectively. When a human element is vital to the success of a project, the Field Nation WorkSmart Workflow platform allows relationships to form and work to get done.

When the Crowd Fails

A large HR software company headquartered in the Midwest began crowdsourcing IT projects in 2010. With more than 3,000 employees in North America, hiring contract labor to handle desk-side system support and perform network upgrades seemed like a cost-efficient way to keep the enterprise on track with its growing IT demands.

The IT director at this company's headquarters realized crowdsourcing came with certain risks but maintained that in order to get work done, tapping large groups of IT contractors to perform projects at the company's offices in Miami, Toronto, Los Angeles and Dallas helped keep his paid staff budget in check and his IT budget on track. His crowdsourcing efforts appeared to work until the IT marketplace began to rebound and quality IT workers became scarce.

Today, this IT director laments his inability to find skilled IT contractors when and where he needs them.

"Too often a project is crowdsourced and a contractor starts it - only to bail out days later for a better job, forcing us to start from square one," he says. "There is no control; no way to ensure the labor we find will follow through; no certainty that these individuals have the qualifications I need. I want a system that will identify quality technicians who come complete with references, a track record of dependability and good work results."

Not a New Problem

During crowdsourcing's heyday, many large companies experimented with the concept only to quickly lose trust in it. They discovered that finding contractors and short term contingency workers this way lacked predictability. These organizations needed to move swiftly because their list of projects was long, but they were still figuring out the risk-reward balance - sometimes with spectacular failures.

What's more, some forms of crowdsourcing actually decreased an organization's visibility and execution of projects. If projects aren't executed well and quality issues occur, the cost of finding a new contractor to re-do the job is huge. The challenges erode both the promise and allure of raw crowdsourcing.

In one well-publicized example, Cambrian House was forced to restructure due to the inability to successfully tap the crowd for execution. In the words of their then CEO:

"A key assumption for us, which proved out not true: given a great idea with great community support and great market test data, we would be able to find (crowdsource) a team willing to execute it...this is where our model fell short....the wisdom of crowds worked well in the model, but it was our participation of crowds aspect which broke down. Trying to find people willing or capable to take on the offspring (our outputs) of the CH model was hard and/or incredibly time consuming."

- via TechCrunch <http://techcrunch.com/2008/05/12/when-crowdsourcing-fails-cambrian-house-headed-to-the-deadpool/>

Organizations that have used the crowdsourcing model understand that, while cost containment remains important, sourcing contractors solely on price is risky business.

The allure of the contingent workforce is based around the flexible scale and immediate availability of subject matter experts. But, to be successful, these expert providers must be empowered to quickly ramp up on the uniqueness of the contracting organization's infrastructure, policies and procedure and decision making processes.

Trust Factor

Field Nation fosters trust between the organization and the expert by:

1. Focusing on the relationship between the service buyer and service provider and creating an ecosystem of trust that goes beyond simple skills, availability and matching.
2. Providing a Preferred Provider Network feature on the platform to encourage and facilitate long-term relationships with people who have earned one another's trust and respect.

Field Nation is invested in the success of each project sourced and managed on the platform, which means companies trust Field Nation resources to get work done.

Without trust-boosting technology and a relationship-centric support model, the “soft” relationship between a business and its crowdsourced staff means details get lost, expectations are mismanaged and projects are delayed.

As global IT spending nears \$3.8 trillion in 2014ⁱⁱ what is the best solution to manage projects and the people who are responsible for completing them?

A Solution Unfolds

Field Nation created its cloud crowd system to bring people together in order to accomplish great work. In short, to help organizations uncrowd the crowd and get work done.

There are thousands of skilled contractors in the world. In fact, the majority of Millennial contract workers are in the 18-40 age group and are well educated – with 48% having attained a technical, associates or bachelors degree (crowdsourcing.org). Older skilled contractors have many years of field experience, which they bring to the table as well. However, as older field service experts age out of the workforce, the Millennial generation is coming up right behind them. They are well educated, tech savvy and hungry for meaningful work. They have grown up as digital natives and easily adapt to different technological and business process environments provided they have very clear expectations set and directives outlines.

The key is building and maintaining a relationship between the buyers who need to use contractors, and the providers who offer expertise to complete projects on budget and on time.

Many of the first-to-market online work marketplace platforms were simply focused on tapping remote talent. These systems thrived where deliverables were electronic and conceptual. Code, brand assets and contract writing were (and still are) popular crowd-sourced tasks. But few of these early systems tackled geography. Anything that could be delivered via email or a file share was fine. But on-premises requirements were ignored. When showing up is required, the massive global crowd of experts is quickly reduced to people within driving distance. For the remote-deliverable platforms, on-site work is a non-starter.

Local experts and local needs continued to be relegated to newspaper want-ad style listings of sites that are big but lack the focus and tools to help find, manage and pay for contract expertise. Business needs appear next to garage sales and people looking for firewood. Enterprises quickly realized that the post and hope method of the big listing services was no way to predictably run their businesses. The context was (and remains) all wrong.

Several small startups emerged in the mid-2000s that attempted to tackle the on-premises expertise challenge. But they focused on moving human capital rather than managing the projects and work orders to success. Organization A could sometimes find Contractor B to complete Project C. But while these platforms succeeded in streamlining access a contingent workforce, buyers discovered they spent excessive amounts of time and money trying to both manage projects to completion and cultivate needed relationships that guaranteed the buyer and provider were on the same page. If they ever did stumble upon a contractor who performed admirably, there was no guarantee they could even find that person again. Trust in the platform diminished and the promise of the wise crowd was tarnished.

While finding experienced contractors is important, developing strong relationships with a reliable, local workforce is paramount to long-term success.

Shifting Demographics

The Baby Boom generation is the second largest generation in history, surpassed only by Millennials.

Boomers are hitting retirement age (globally) at the pace of 10,000 every day. What's more, this trend will continue every day for the next 16 years.

These older, Boomer generation service experts are more experienced and in high demand even after they retire. Organizations must equip themselves with technology and practice that preserves and shares that learned expertise. Platforms like Field Nation center on the relationship while preserving the information, processes and best practices that power the next generation of service experts.

Data from PEW research <http://www.pewresearch.org/daily-number/baby-boomers-retire/>

Field Nation's online platform was created to help buyers and providers build sound working relationships so both can be successful. Because of the platform's focus on detailed work order workflow and stage-gated project management (communication between buyer and provider), strong relationships result from each interaction. Effective buyer/provider matches are made, and organizations obtain quality work at a fair price.

Field Nation is unique in its 360-degree view of the online buyer/provider relationship. The platform specializes in on-site service delivery and providers using FieldNation.com deliver expert services. Buyers who request and oversee projects using the platform's capabilities are fully transparent as well – each party creates a profile, shakes hands when they engage and does business in a highly personal way. This helps project managers form a human relationship with the providers they do business with - which is essential in order to uncrowd the crowd and develop trust in each contract engagement.

Putting Field Nation to Work for You

Consider how Field Nation's platform uncrowds the crowd for organizations that need skilled contract labor. Through FieldNation.com, organizations can automate and source projects, find skilled people, manage workflow and create long-term relationships that make future staffing decisions easier and more cost effective.

- FieldNation.com is a free platform. With no price barrier, organizations can register, try the set of tools and discover just how powerful Field Nation's platform is. Enterprises quickly benefit from a robust set of matching capabilities designed to help them find skilled people for projects. With Field Nation, the baseline check-offs are encouraged with all users, including:
 - Background checks
 - Drug tests
 - Insurance
 - Certifications
 - Real-time rating system allowing buyers to see how other organizations rated a contractor's capabilities and performance
- Field Nation helps organizations create and maintain the relationships they need with individuals selected for key projects. Project managers can quickly match specific project requirements with the skills and interests of qualified contractors. As confidence in the platform increases, individuals can create a ready access team that's available for each project.

Transparency between the buyer and the providers is a key differentiator of Field Nation's user interface. Because buyers can comment on provider capabilities and providers can also share input on relationships with buyers, the Field Nation platform provides both groups with highly valuable information. Work environments and work experience are noted for other users to see. This humanization between the buyer/provider groups results in better matching and relationship development.

Putting Your Bench to Work

The benefits for large enterprises or local SMBs is profound.

Enterprises that thrive on having their teams maximize billing hours can also turn to Field Nation to fill downtime and project voids. An IT director, for example, can set up an in-house service group using the Field Nation platform – essentially enabling IT workers to use their skills and perform work for other businesses that need deskside or network support services, for example. The result is 100 percent uptime and a new source of revenue for the organization.

The Field Nation solution also allows organizations to turn the

discomfort that other automation systems bring into a competitive advantage and growth opportunity. In the past, if an organization automated it would often reduce headcount to save the organization money. With Field Nation, however, businesses can leverage that extra staff by using the added capacity to generate revenue through platform sourced work opportunities. FieldNation.com becomes a growth engine for SMBs in this way.

Three Steps to Uncrowding the Crowd

Instead of sourcing from a disengaged crowd and then participating in a bidding war that nets inexperienced people incapable of completing projects, use FieldNation.com to streamline the process of local expertise location, collaboration and relationship building. Uncrowd the crowd in these three simple steps:

1. Identify Geo-Matched Skilled Service Providers

The “crowd” provides anonymous expertise in aggregate. But work isn’t done as an aggregate. At some point an individual expert or team must be identified who can provide quality work and complete projects on time and within budget. Field Nation’s WorkSmart Matching enables buyers to identify the expertise needed to complete projects quickly and efficiently. Matching is based first on skills, availability and interest - and then on any combination of criteria that is uniquely needed for a project or work order. Need a person with access to a bucket lift or security clearance? Filter based on that kind of equipment or certification. Want to pick from interested experts who have passed your specific training and certification process? Stand up a stage-gated certification process, complete with quizzing and scoring, in our training manager. Need particular licenses or certifications? Search, sort and score based on those. The core of FieldNation.com matching is not just about a resume listing but also about proven experience and quality.

That interest must be shared. The expert, or expert service company, must also be willing to actively engage with each service buyer requesting his/her/their services. No relationship is one-sided, and building successful working relationships upon that foundation of trust is what makes Field Nation unique.

2. Manage The Project At Hand To Completion

No matter how simple or complex, each project must be managed effectively – with proper communication, well-defined scope, insight and real-time intelligence. Where other project management systems collect content, Field Nation’s WorkSmart Workflow system creates a collaboration ecosystem where work gets done. Service buyers stay on top of each project from start to finish as well as inception all the way through payment. Service providers stay on task with real-time status and progress reporting, geo-tagged and time stamped check-ins, tool requirements and integrated UPS and FedEx shipping tracking.

Specific tasks and required deliverables are added in the sequence that you want based on your history with the system as well as with drag-and-drop simplicity. Automatic notifications are emailed to different stake holders when each work or project stage is complete. Large scale projects are automatically uploaded based on project templates. A single project and work order dashboard ensures at-a-glance awareness of the status and progress of each work order and each project.

As projects pass through their stages, integrated reporting escalates exceptions and prompts users, whether in the field or in the office, with the next steps they need. When all required deliverables have been completed and all work is accepted as complete, the service expert is paid directly from the account funded by the service buyer and managed by Field Nation.

Field Nation handles all yearly 1099 reporting for work completed on the Field Nation platform.

3. Capture Business Intelligence

Field Nation allows buyers to capture real-time data with each project. Using the platform, individuals can monitor and track workflow, status and the next best action to take. Users engage with each other, and all communications on the platform are captured for analysis and logging. Service buyers may rate the provider interactions and outcomes, and the ratings and feedback are collected in a scorecard that provides proof of real results and quality. Organizations put the business intelligence from each project to use generating efficiencies and deeper best practices for each project that follows.

Summary

Projects will continue to grow in complexity – demanding people with detailed knowledge, expertise and skillsets. Whether dealing with the unstoppable demographic shifts or challenges of remote locations, Field Nation's platform ensures any organization can find the expertise needed for specific projects anytime, anywhere.

Organizations can staff, track and manage each project while keeping workflow on schedule and on budget. The platform captures vital details and data and then delivers it back as actionable business intelligence that leaders can use to think ahead, plan and forecast upcoming needs.

Field Nation makes your staff sourcing needs easier, faster and financially viable in order to get work done.

What Can Your World Look Like Using Field Nation?

Buyers who leverage Field Nation quickly experience the platform's benefits.

For example, Worldlink Integration Group, a national provider of technology deployment services with offices located across the United States, has used the Field Nation platform to successfully complete large, U.S.-wide projects.

In one instance, Worldlink engaged with Field Nation to source providers and successfully update point-of-sale devices at a client's 1,200 U.S. retail sites.

The experienced professionals available through Field Nation help Worldlink when they're in a pinch.



About Field Nation

Field Nation brings people together to accomplish great work. Field Nation's online platform combines deep marketplace coverage with complete project and work order workflow management platform to deliver onsite expertise anytime and anywhere it is needed. Deep business analytics, reporting and integrations to the most popular ticketing and accounting software means Field Nation delivers actionable insight while making it easier to get work done. Whether companies of 1 or 1000 need to manage internal staff projects, contingent workforce tasks or source local service for immediate needs, Field Nation is their choice to get work done. Field Nation, Get Work. Done.

ⁱ Chung, Anne, Jackson, Tim, Laseter, Tim (2002) Why Outsourcing Is In. Strategy + Business Magazine. <http://www.strategy-business.com/article/20272?gko=656f9> Accessed 4.4.2014

Sinha, P., Akoorie, M.E.M., Ding, Q. & Wu, Q. (2011). What motivates manufacturing SMEs to outsource offshore in China?: Comparing the perspectives of SME manufacturers and their suppliers. Strategic Outsourcing: An International Journal, 4(1), 67-88.

ⁱⁱ Gartner, "Gartner Says Worldwide IT Spending on Pace to Reach \$3.8 Trillion in 2014" <http://www.gartner.com/newsroom/id/2643919>