Crowdsourcing: Promise or Hazard? Part A: Debate at the Fort Myers, FL, *News-Press*

Abstract

This two-part case looks at the research method known as "crowdsourcing," pioneered by the private sector (*The Wisdom of Crowds*), and examines its usefulness for journalism. The Fort Myers (FL) *News-Press* is a Gannett paper; Gannett executives believe crowdsourcing—turning to consumers for expertise and information—holds promise for newspapers. In Part 1, *News-Press* editors consider the merits of crowdsourcing to the newspaper. They look at several ongoing news stories to which the method might be applied in order to select the most promising. They then debate whether or not to adopt the method as an experiment. Part 2 traces what happens when the newspaper does apply crowdsourcing to a story about a utility expansion project in the community of Cape Coral.

Students will gain insight into the challenges confronting a publication that decides to approach its job in a new way. They will experience what goes on around the editorial table when innovation is the topic. They will also gain a window into the relationship between a corporate newspaper owner and a publication's editors. In Part B, they will have a chance to consider the impact of the new approach on reporters, editors—and readers. They will come to understand how crucial it is to plan for new undertakings, and to anticipate problems as a means of avoiding them. They will also gain perspective on the costs and benefits of being a pioneer.

This case can be used in a course about editorial decision-making, about the business of journalism, about journalism innovation, or about local/regional media.

Credits

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