

Why community is key

Innovation expert Cris Beswick, of Let's Think Beyond, looks at the role of community on the Road To Innovation

ORIGINALLY I was going to talk about culture. After all, everyone talks about creating the 'right' business culture.

But culture doesn't take you far enough down the road if you really want to push your business forward.

In society it's social communities that help unite different cultures. In the '50s my grandparents knew every one of their neighbours, all their children, what everyone did for a living and there was a sense that help, assistance and cross fertilizing of different people's needs and skills was only a knock on someone's door away. Unfortunately today that has been somewhat lost.

So it dawned on me. If owners and managers could turn their business culture into a community – like one from the 1950s where everyone knows each other, where people talk to each other, where they take an active interest in what each other is doing and where people are willing to offer help and support whenever and wher-

ever it's needed – it would have the same positive impact commercially as it does socially.

If you want to create a truly forward thinking, innovative business, creating the right environment for your people to thrive is vital, creating a community is vital.

The first thing to recognise is that success lies in choosing the right innovation champions. These are people everyone in the business can connect with, people who don't just filter supporting messages down from the top, but feed the voice of the organisation out from the centre.

Traditional business models are more monologue than dialogue but some companies actively create two-way processes.

However, what I'm talking about is going beyond dialogue and establishing a company-wide conversation.



Innovation requires a company to fight the status quo and embrace change. Innovation will only thrive where anyone from anywhere in the organisation can voice an idea and, if it's an interesting one, get support to push it forward.

So embrace change but don't embark on massive upheaval. Focus on more subtle, ongoing changes. That way you'll create far more empowered teams of people who care enough to be bothered about thinking differently and contributing.

It's then that the business starts to benefit. Your people also benefit from going home and feeling that they have made a valuable contribution.

So imagine what could happen if you delivered a strategy in which everyone in your business does it, thus creating a sustainable community of continuous improvers. And one of the key factors that will deliver that community is rethinking the environment you work in, so that's what I'll talk about next month.

Until then, if you want to know more about this or any of the subjects covered over the past few months email me at cris@crisbeswick.com

Pay as you go websites

A WEB design company has come up with a novel solution to help struggling new businesses get started online.

In an effort to beat the recession FurlongDesign is offering small and medium sized businesses a professional website at no initial cost.

Instead, businesses can pay a monthly lease of £100, usually for around 12 months, for a tailor-made website, including free unlimited web hosting and a free domain and content management system. Or they can negotiate a profit share with the design company – so they only have to pay if they are making money.

Barnabas Nagy, who has worked for Tetra Pak and Samsung, set up the company four years ago in Hungary and relocated to Luton last year.

He said: "The majority of small businesses do not have the resources to invest in high start-up commitments, especially for an untried venture."

"Now, businesses can be up and running with a professional website from day one without investing a penny."

The 24-year-old said he came up with the profit share idea when one of his clients was struggling to pay. He said the economic climate was prompting businesses to use sub-standard web-



'SOLUTIONS MAN': Barnabas Nagy

designers or asking friends to knock something up instead.

"Business went quiet for me and people were saying they didn't have the money to start up a website," he said.

"This idea came to mind when a client was unable to pay. I am a solutions man and I wanted to try to try it. I'll take a risk on whether clients will pay because I'm confident it can work."

The company, which also does branding and graphic design, has clinched contracts with businesses in Australia and Canada for the profit share scheme.

Now Barnabas is using the website Linked In and networking groups in Luton to generate more business.

>> www.furlongdesign.com

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