

**CROWDSOURCING AND THE VANCOUVER WHITECAPS: AN ANALYSIS
OF POTENTIAL SUCCESSES**

by

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Abstract

The Vancouver Whitecaps are an up-and-coming soccer franchise that is currently a part of the United Soccer League (USL). After summarizing what crowdsourcing is, the Vancouver Whitecaps are deemed a good candidate to apply crowdsourcing methods. This is determined by comparing the Vancouver Whitecaps' existing crowd, and potential future crowd, to the crowd characteristics necessary to take advantage of crowdsourcing. Once determined that the Vancouver Whitecaps are a successful candidate, three potential crowdsourcing projects are presented, including how to measure the success of those projects.

Keywords: Crowdsourcing, marketing, value, the Vancouver Whitecaps, sports franchise

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1: Introduction

The Vancouver Whitecaps are an up-and-coming soccer franchise that is currently a part of the United Soccer League (USL). The club has been playing in various North American leagues since its inception in 1974, and while there have been some bumps along the road, the club has achieved much success. The team is about to embark on the newest and arguably most exciting phase of its history: expansion into Major League Soccer (MLS). MLS is North America's largest and most successful soccer league, so expansion into the league gives recognition to the Vancouver Whitecaps that they are moving in the right direction.

To have gained the expansion into MLS, the Vancouver Whitecaps had to submit a bid into the league requesting admission. This bid was to convince MLS officials that the Vancouver Whitecaps were a premier soccer team living in a viable city. To do so, the team emphasized a number of things. First was drawing attention to their ownership team, recently strengthened by adding two-time NBA MVP Steve Nash into the mix. Second was showing that the team already has tremendous support from not only the already-strong soccer community, but also the business community within Vancouver. Third, the Vancouver Whitecaps included their plans to lease out BC Place. This was an important step because it showed that the Whitecaps were committed to expanding their fan base because BC Place, after being newly renovated with soccer-specific features, will be able to house approximately 20,000 soccer fans. This is a large increase in patrons since its current home field, Swangard Stadium in Burnaby, British Columbia, only holds

5,288 people. Another component that helped build the bid for MLS expansion was the backing of the province's Premier, Gordon Campbell, in which he said that the Whitecaps have a long and proud history within the province. In the end, the MLS officials were pleased with the Vancouver Whitecaps' bid and granted them admission to MLS beginning in 2011 (Vancouver Whitecaps FC, 2009).

The expansion phase will occur over two years, as the club's first MLS game will not be played until the 2011 season. While the players will not be gearing up for MLS life until then, the people that make up the business side of the organization will be working feverishly for the next two years to prepare for a successful inaugural season. In fact, the day after the successful bid was announced to the city of Vancouver, the marketing department began its first campaign to raise awareness of the 2011 season.

Marketing will be a key component to the Vancouver Whitecaps' success as a franchise come 2011. With the successful bid comes the challenge of creating a new product and everything that comes with it. By that I mean such things as, the promotional work that comes with rebranding a franchise. Also, new price points will need to be calculated given the four-fold increase in capacity. The Vancouver Whitecaps will have to consider whether or not old distribution channels are enough, or whether the organization will need to expand in that area as well. These are just a few of the many options that now confront the business part of the Vancouver Whitecaps.

While there is no denying that all aspects of the 4 Ps of marketing (product, price, place and promotion) are important in the rebranding of the Vancouver Whitecaps, I will be focusing on the promotional side of the equation. I will be proposing that, given their plans for expansion, the Whitecaps are faced with a unique situation that I believe

enables them to take advantage of the recently defined phenomenon known as crowdsourcing.

I begin the paper by summarizing the factors that are crucial to the success of crowdsourcing projects. Afterwards, I will discuss the reasons behind my argument that the Vancouver Whitecaps are good candidates to take advantage of crowdsourcing. Finally, I will make some suggestions on how the Vancouver Whitecaps could begin to use crowdsourcing, even in the early stages of their MLS expansion plans.

2: Crowdsourcing – a Summary

2.1 Types of crowdsourcing

Defined in 2006 by Jeff Howe, crowdsourcing is “the act of taking a job traditionally performed by a designated agent (usually an employee) and outsourcing it to an undefined, generally large group of people in the form of an open call” (Howe, n.d., para 4). Two years later Howe went on to publish a book on the subject. In the book he would identify four primary forms of crowdsourcing, each accomplishing a different result but relying on a crowd to achieve it.

The first form of crowdsourcing is collective intelligence. Howe maintains that having a large and diverse crowd will ultimately deliver an answer to a problem equal, if not superior, to that produced by experts. The crowd would leverage the varying backgrounds of its members to approach the problem from multitude of different and potentially fresh approaches. Because experts are usually trained in a particular way, they may only think and approach problems from similar vantage points, so if a problem is especially perplexing then it could require some fresh perspectives, something a large and diverse crowd possesses (Howe, 2008).

The second form of crowdsourcing is crowd creation. This type of crowdsourcing is akin to the aforementioned collective intelligence, only the result desired is that of an idea or creative force. Here the problem revolves around creation of a new idea instead of solving a specific problem. The idea is that a large crowd holds much more creativity within it than a small group of people. Again, like collective intelligence, it relies on the

distinct backgrounds of its members to help produce something useful, in the creative sense. Examples are user-generated content such as videos that can be used for ad campaigns or designs for a sports team's jersey (Howe, 2008).

The third form of crowdsourcing is crowd voting. What is accomplished with crowd voting is the crowd giving its collective judgment on something posed to them. This can be especially useful when receiving massive amounts of information that employees would otherwise have to sort through, thus saving on costs by getting rid of a task (Howe, 2008).

Finally, the fourth form of crowdsourcing is known as crowdfunding. This requires the crowd to essentially spare some change. Given the large numbers within the crowd though, even if the monetary contributions are small (micro-transactions), collectively it can accumulate into a large sum of money.

2.2 Crowd characteristics

That is not to say that there are not a few things that the crowd needs before one can begin to leverage its positive attributes. In my first paper I lay out nine characteristics that allow a crowd to be useful. It is not mandatory for a crowd to have every attribute, but it is my belief that the more characteristics the crowd has the more useful it will be.

For the crowd to be useful, an organization must ensure not only that the crowd it is looking to for answers has a commonality, but that it feels a deep commitment towards that commonality. It must be passionate for what draws them all together. For example, regarding the Vancouver Whitecaps, its crowd's commonality is its love for the franchise and/or sport.

On top of this deep commitment there must be an ability to solve the problem at hand. One cannot expect to simply round up a large group of people and have them solve any problem given to them. Also, some form of incentive should be involved. While there may be personal incentives by the members themselves, I believe it is important for the organization to provide incentive as well. The crowd does not like to be taken advantage of, so by providing an incentive this takes away from the image that the company is simply being opportunistic. Also, as mentioned many times already, the crowd should be large and diverse. This allows for many different views to approaching the same issue.

Next, the crowd must include the creator of the issue as a member. This is because crowdsourcing relies on trust. As I mentioned, the crowd does not want to be taken advantage of, so by participating and listening to their suggestions, the decision-making increases that level of trust.

Also, it pays to protect one's self against what is known as a cascade. A cascade is when a crowd perpetuates false information with the belief that it is true. This occurs when, after the first few members of the crowd have made their decision, subsequent members simply follow suit, as they "believe they're learning something important from the example of others" (Surowiecki, 2004). An organization must protect their crowds from falling victim to such a phenomenon. There are two ways a company can protect against this. First, make the decision the crowd is deciding upon important, and second, allow members to make their decisions at the very same time, or as close to the same time as possible. This will have members rely more on their personal information more than the public information available to them.

Finally, the crowd must have a means to communicate, or a place to congregate. Thanks to the proliferation of the Internet, online forums are the most convenient location for crowds with the above characteristics to converse with one another. There are certain characteristics that are needed for the online forum as well.

The online forum should have sub-categories for members to choose from. Also, the online forum should give users the ability to communicate with one another. This will enhance user engagement from the outset instead of them logging in to a blank slate with nothing going on.

Next, the forum needs to have a dedicated Webmaster who has the ability to make changes on the fly. The changes will come from the crowd itself because in the end, what the crowd wants the crowd should receive.

Also, the product that the crowd is rallying/congregating around must be something understood. A counter example of this would be the Assignment Zero, a joint project between Jeff Howe and New York University journalism professor, Jay Rosen. The two wanted to explore the concept of crowdsourcing by actually using crowdsourcing. The topic was still too new to have the crowd really grasp what was wanted from them, so in the end the project failed.

2.3 Crowdsourcing and marketing value

Crowdsourcing can give a company a boost in the form of either cost savings, typically through process efficiencies, or new revenues. The first form of crowdsourcing, crowd intelligence, typically helps out a firm out through an increase in process efficiencies. Tapping into the crowd's collective intelligence can allow companies to

bypass problems that could either block progress for an indefinite amount of time, or worse yet, forever. In doing so, resources would be wasted attempting to beat this roadblock (Howe, 2008).

Crowd creation can be used to help generate marketing material such as videos, pictures, drawings and audio clips, just to name a few. The value here is in the crowd's collective creativity that the organization can use to spearhead a number of initiatives. A company can essentially pass on the creative and production costs of making a video or picture (to name a few) on to the user by asking them to do it. Remember though, incentive and trust must be present in the transaction otherwise the members of the crowd will not lend their creative talents. Members do not want to be taken advantage of, but instead feel as if they are helping out the organization while also fulfilling an internal desire (Howe, 2008).

Crowd voting is the next form of crowdsourcing and its value lies in not only receiving valuable feedback from the crowd regarding marketing campaigns, but also in passing off a potentially large task of sifting through large amounts of information. For example, if an organization were to make an open call for members to make videos expressing their devotion for a particular team, an influx of videos ranging in quality would be entered. By allowing the crowd to vote on which they deem best the company saves on costs of having to hire someone to sift through all the entries for which one is the best. Also, if a new ad campaign is discussed and/or shown to the crowd, they can quickly express their collective judgment on whether they believe it best suits the company (Howe, 2008).

The final form of crowdsourcing is called crowdfunding, and its value lies in money generation through many micro-transactions of minimal summations. This saves the organization money by not having to front their money to produce something. A classic example of this is when a man named William Brooks purchased the professional football team, Ebbsfleet United Football Club, by collecting over collecting over £700,000 in increments of just £35 (Howe, 2008).

Marketing is an important part to every company, and with the effects of crowdsourcing now readily available (if set up correctly), a lot of companies can begin to take advantage of the talents lying within the crowds that love and adhere to their product(s).

3: The Vancouver Whitecaps – a good candidate for crowdsourcing

To determine whether or not the Vancouver Whitecaps would be a good candidate to take advantage of crowdsourcing, one must look at their fan base and organizational capabilities. By fan base I mean one with the above crowd characteristics, or at least the potential for having them, and by organizational capabilities I mean looking at whether or not the Vancouver Whitecaps have the ability to foster the community with its current organizational resources.

3.1 Crowd characteristics and the Vancouver Whitecaps fans

3.1.1 Commonality

For any crowdsourcing project to be successful, there needs to be a crowd, but it cannot be just any kind of crowd. A crowdsourcing crowd needs a commonality between them. In other words, there needs to be something that brings them all together. There needs to be something that they all care about.

The Vancouver Whitecaps crowd consists of their fans, and their fans rally around the sport of soccer. Therefore I believe it is sufficient to say that soccer is the commonality that the Vancouver Whitecaps have that will bring its crowd together.

Soccer is a strong commonality in which to build a crowd. Not only is soccer “the most popular sport in the world” (Dunning, 1999), but it is also quite popular within the city of Vancouver and the province as a whole as well. In fact, “soccer is by far the

number one participatory sport in British Columbia with over 120,000 registered players” (Vancouver Whitecap FC, 2008).

I believe that having a commonality from which to base their crowd around is not a problem for the Vancouver Whitecaps.

3.1.2 Deep commitment

If one were to attend a soccer game in Europe, a dedicated and passionate crowd would be witnessed. Typical European crowds not only stand for the entire game, but also tend to chant or make a lot of noise as well. In other words, European crowds are well known for being passionate soccer fans.

Soccer’s popularity has not reached that kind of level here in North America, but there are signs that soccer is indeed important to the city of Vancouver and that its inhabitants are, or will become, dedicated soccer fans. These signs are: the attendance seen throughout the Vancouver Whitecaps’ 35-year history, the activity of the main supporter club of the Vancouver Whitecaps, and how quickly advance season ticket deposits sold when the organization announced its successful MLS bid.

Throughout their history, the Vancouver Whitecaps have received wonderful attendance. For example, in their inaugural game in 1974, the team saw 17,343 people show up to watch the Vancouver Whitecaps lose to the San Jose Earthquake. Another example is when they moved to BC Place in 1984. Their first game drew 60,342 people. More recently, when the LA Galaxy toured North America with their newest star, David Beckham, they played a friendly match against the Whitecaps within BC Place drawing a crowd of 48,172 fans (Stinson, D., 2008). And this year, the Whitecaps have averaged an

attendance record of 5,268 fans. Swangard stadium's official capacity sits at 5,288. These numbers tell me that soccer is alive and well in Vancouver, and it has been for quite some time (Vancouver Whitecaps FC, n.d.).

The Vancouver Whitecaps main supporter group, the Southsiders, have a reasonable following of dedicated and committed fans, especially considering how little promotion there is of the group. The only other Canadian MLS franchise, Toronto FC, openly promote its supporter clubs, and has over 3,000 registered message board members. So I believe that the Southsiders' number of 408 registered members is respectable. I believe this number can rise given more promotion, but what is more important is the group's attitude. The Southsiders are a passionate bunch that continually make noise and chant in an attempt to bring a European atmosphere to Swangard stadium. If one is to look on their website, they would see a plethora of chants totalling to forty-two (The Vancouver Southsiders, n.d.). Members attend all home games and even have their own section in the stadium (the South end of the stadium), and during away games they typically set up gatherings at pubs in Vancouver. This supporter group wear the same colour, have a number of chants, and remain boisterous throughout the game, much like their European counterparts.

Another indication of soccer's rising popularity within Vancouver is the speed at which season ticket deposits sold for the 2011 season, the first year the Vancouver Whitecaps are to join the biggest North American soccer league, the MLS. After announcing that the Vancouver Whitecaps had successfully penetrated MLS, they said they would sell 5,000 season ticket deposits, and within 48 hours of being available to the public, all 5,000 deposits were taken (Anonymous, 2009). To gain perspective on just

how significant that is, consider that Swangard stadium, the Vancouver Whitecaps current home field, holds only 5,288 fans.

3.1.3 Incentive

Regardless of what activity is being requested of the crowd, some form of incentive must be given. Organizations must be careful not to take advantage of the crowd, or even give off the impression that it is using the crowd. There is a fine balance between the crowd and the company that must be kept, one that involves trust. One way to help maintain that balance is to provide proper incentive.

Incentive is something the Vancouver Whitecaps would have to create on their own, so it is not something that can necessarily help determine the Vancouver Whitecaps' current level of candidacy. But I will comment on how the organization can approach incentives, thus providing an understanding of how it should be handled.

Incentive must be considered at the time the activity is being asked of the crowd. This is because it must relate and be adequate to what is being requested of the crowd. Incentive can be a financial-based prize, but it can also be as simple as group-wide publicity for the winner of a contest. For example, if the Vancouver Whitecaps held a contest to design the look of the season tickets, which are printed and mailed to thousands of people, they could entice designers through increased exposure by printing the designer's name on every ticket.

While such a prize such as printing the designer's name on every ticket is seemingly trivial, it should be noted that there are a vast array of incentives that can drive people, and they should not be ignored simply because they are not monetary. A good

example is the website of Threadless.com. It is a site where hundreds of thousands of people congregate. From these hundreds of thousands of people, Threadless.com gains top-quality design submissions, which, after each are voted on by the same community of people, are then printed on t-shirts and sold on the website. Threadless.com, in a way, employs thousands of designers for a fraction of the cost. They are able to achieve this because of proper incentives. While Threadless.com does give out monetary rewards, they are given to only a select few designers that get their designs printed on the shirt. Others are there for different reasons, reasons such as to “get feedback from fellow artists... [or they] enjoy interacting with consumers and designers” (Lakhani & Kanji, 2008).

Non-monetary incentives should not be ignored. In fact, I believe they should be promoted even if there is a monetary reward. It might draw in more members into the crowd because not everyone is simply in it to make money.

3.1.4 Diversity

Diversity is a key component to having the crowd be able to lend a helping hand to organizations. This is because the greater the diversity, the greater the number of approaches and views that can be administered to a potential problem or situation. This aids in a solution because, “in certain conditions... a randomly selected collection of problem solvers outperforms a collection of the best individual problem solvers” (Howe, 2008). The main reasoning behind this is because the top problem-solvers are trained similarly and so they will approach problems from the same angle. The opposite is true of a diverse crowd.

The Vancouver Whitecaps have an advantage of having a more diverse crowd because, as a whole, the city of Vancouver is extremely diverse. Many people come from all over the world to live in Vancouver. In fact, of all people living in Vancouver, 46% of them are foreign born (Statistics Canada, 2007). If one were to delve deeper into the make up of Vancouver's population, they would see a vast array of cultures from around the world represented here. For example, there are a large number of Chinese within Vancouver, while other cultures of the world, such as Latin American and Filipino, are also represented (Statistics Canada, 2007). Not unexpectedly, there are multiple religions represented within Vancouver as well. A few of them, but certainly not all of them, are Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism (Statistics Canada, 2007).

Why people immigrate to Vancouver is a personal decision, but based on the numbers presented above, it can be determined that the city is a popular destination for people from all over the world. Teamed with the fact that soccer is more popular in other sections of the world (when compared to North America), I believe Vancouver has a wonderful potential to house a large and diverse soccer crowd.

3.1.5 Means to communication

While the Vancouver Whitecaps do not have a message board or online forum as part of their website set up right now, they have a couple of options they can look at moving forward. First, they could incorporate a message board on to the new website they plan to launch in an attempt to rebrand the franchise. While the public release date for this rebranding is still unknown, a new website is seemingly in the works as the Vancouver Whitecaps have registered and begun, albeit rather simply, building a website for the MLS expansion team. Having the forums on their own website would allow the

company to vet who is given and who is denied membership. Further restrictions could be put in place, for instance a ban on foul language, because with the organization running the site it would have total control. This way the Vancouver Whitecaps could possibly eliminate as much inappropriate material before it is even posted.

Second, the Vancouver Whitecaps could simply try to incorporate already existing but outside message boards. For example, the Southsiders already have a reasonably active message board system running on their official site (The Vancouver Southsiders Forum, n.d.). Also, the MLS site also has a link to message boards, where the Vancouver Whitecaps already have their own dedicated sub-forum. Doing so would take the onus off of the franchise to run the message boards. This would be a way around foul language barriers, or other such restrictions. That being said, the organization would be giving up total control to another group of people. This is not necessarily a bad thing though, especially if they are fans of the Vancouver Whitecaps.

The Vancouver Whitecaps could simply have a link on their official website taking visitors to the outside message board. Of course, members of the organization would have to be on the message boards as well, but that could be easily done.

All in all, the Vancouver Whitecaps have the means to communication, they simply would have to choose between options when building the new website for the MLS franchise. Either they should build a message board within their official website or link to outside message boards. Either way, having a means of communication would help foster a community feel around the team.

3.1.6 Able to solve problem

This will probably prove the most difficult category. Sports are ubiquitous within North American culture, but soccer is not yet on par with other sports like football and basketball. If and when it does get to the same level, there is the problem of finding exactly the kind of people that are needed to deal with a particular problem at a particular time, whatever that problem may be. There are steps that the Vancouver Whitecaps can take now that can help relieve that problem if it presents itself.

The Vancouver Whitecaps should begin to sort their crowd members immediately. I believe this can be done via the online forums. There is a tendency for Vancouver online sports forums, such as the Vancouver Canucks message board (Canucks.com Message Board, n.d.) and the Southsiders message board (The Vancouver Southsiders Forum, n.d.), to have very few sub-forums. There are few specifications, and when looking at the sub-forums that both message boards do have, the subjects of those sub-forums revolve around the team and not the customer.

I propose sectioning off the sub-forums more, thus giving visitors to the site more to engage in and more of a chance to interact on a level they are familiar with. For example, the Vancouver Whitecaps, if and when they build a message board, can create a Creative Media sub-forum where visitors can post their creations. Submissions can be creative ideas for what the 2011 Vancouver Whitecaps uniforms should look like, or possibly wallpapers involving Vancouver Whitecaps players.

It should also be noted that a good way of determining what sub-forums should be included is by listening to the members of the crowd. In other words, listen to what the crowd wants and give it to them. Doing so will help better communication between

crowd members because they will have dedicated areas to discuss topics they are interested in furthering their engagement, even if those topics lie outside of soccer. It also helps build trust between the organization and the crowd, thus facilitating participation in crowdsourcing projects.

Letting the crowd chose the sub-forums is a better way of determining the set up because it takes away the organization having to guess the set up. This betters the success of any sub-forum that is set up on the online forums. Jeff Howe put it best: “You can try to guide the community, but ultimately you’ll wind up following them” (Howe, 2008).

3.1.7 Large

Sports teams typically enjoy a large following that can span the globe. Part of this is because people feel the “need to express who they are to others by means of group membership. One prominent way that individuals do this is through identification with sports teams” (Wakefield, K., 2007). Much like how many people cheer for athletes they have never heard of in the Olympics simply because they are from their home country, individuals may form a bond with local sports teams because they represent the individual’s hometown. This bond can maintain even if individuals move to a new city. Thanks to the Internet and advancements in television technology, one can watch games of almost any professional and even semi-professional team from anywhere in the world.

In its 2011 campaign, Vancouver Whitecaps will be moving to a new stadium, BC Place, which will be roughly four times the size of its current home, Swangard stadium. To fill this stadium will require newer, larger and more penetrating marketing efforts in an attempt to fill as many seats as possible for every single game. These marketing efforts

will increase the club's exposure thus giving it wonderful potential to grow its fan base even more.

It should once again be noted that the Vancouver Whitecaps organization managed to sell out the initial 5,000 season ticket deposits for its inaugural MLS season in less than 48 hours. This shows the potential for a large demand. This should not come as a surprise because when the Whitecaps briefly played within BC Place during the 1980s they showed success at drawing a reasonable crowd. For example, on the first game they played in the stadium, there was an attendance of 60,342 (Vancouver Whitecaps FC, n.d.). This is a strong testament to how large a following soccer once enjoyed in Vancouver.

3.1.8 Protection against cascades

Much like the Vancouver Whitecaps' means to communication, protection against cascades is something that should be decided upon in the future. This is not something the Vancouver Whitecaps necessarily have to tie down now. At this point, as long as they are aware of the potential for cascades to occur they are on the right path. When the organization is closer to undertaking a crowdsourcing project, then it would be wise to discuss protection methods.

Once again, a cascade is when a crowd perpetuates false information with the belief that it is true. Cascades occur when people believe they are learning something new based on decisions other people have made. In other words, other people's decisions can have an influence on our own decisions. A simple example is an experiment done in 1968 involving people on a street corner looking up into the sky influencing passing pedestrians.

The social experiment found that as more people stood on a street corner staring into an empty sky, the more passers by would do the same. This showed that people have “the tendency to assume that if lots of people are doing something or believe something, there must be a good reason why” (Surowiecki, 2004). This does not ensure a proper result, but it does ensure a large backing for a particular action or result. Unknowing pedestrians’ decisions (of whether to look upwards or continue on their way) were influenced by those placed on the street corner looking upwards.

The reason the pedestrians would look upwards was because they could see the crowd doing the same thing. By covering up the crowd it is likely that the pedestrians would have simply continued on their way. In other words, if you made their decisions independent of the crowd’s decision (to look upwards), they might not have followed suit. Independent choice is one of the protections against cascades (Surowiecki, 2004). A good example using the Vancouver Whitecaps would be posing a vote on the website, or message boards. The visitor can only see the results of the vote after they have voted him or herself. All comments, results and information regarding the aftermath of the vote remains hidden until he or she has voted.

Another way to increase the validity of the choice the crowd makes is to make the decision important. By this I mean make the outcome of the situation or decision something the crowd, and each independent member of the crowd, deems worthy of his/her time and thinking prowess. Such a situation will empower each member to rely more on his or her own intelligence and less on any public knowledge they see before him or her.

Regardless of how complex or simple the crowdsourcing project, I believe it is good practice to try and control cascades from occurring. By implementing one or both of these practices when calling upon the crowd to help out one can better rely on the result.

3.1.9 Organization as part of the crowd

The main reason the organization needs to be part of the crowd is to help ensure that the organization can be trusted. Crowds will not simply offer up their services because they are asked to do so. There must be a number of things in place beforehand, and trust is one of these things. And I believe trust can be built with the crowd by simply conversing with them, listening to them, and acknowledging them for what they are: passionate followers with talents, creativity and ideas.

I do not believe this to be an issue with the Vancouver Whitecaps as Ryan McKee, the Vancouver Whitecaps Manager of Marketing, is already actively involved with portions of the fan base, specifically the team's supporter club, the Southsiders. McKee comes out to supporter club gatherings when the team is playing an away game, and he also posts on the Southsiders forums.

Again, this is critical because Ryan McKee is helping build trust between the organization and its most loyal supporters, and trust is a key ingredient to achieving a successful crowdsourcing project.

3.2 Organizational resources and crowdsourcing

3.2.1 Online forum

The Vancouver Whitecaps are looking to rebuild their website for the upcoming 2011 inaugural season. Among the goals they hope to achieve with the new site are an

increase in robustness, an overhaul to incorporate the new brand, whatever that future brand may be, and an increase in fan interactivity (R. McKee, personal communication, June 5, 2009). Another addition I would like to see is an online forum, or at least a clear and visible link to an outsider forum so that Vancouver Whitecaps fans can converse with one another. This of course needs a particular set up, but with the fact that the Vancouver Whitecaps are looking to redesign their website for 2011, I believe this is a perfect opportunity to include an online forum to it.

Having an online forum for the organization's crowd use to communicate with one another is critical. This develops a sense of community that helps engage past, current and future members. This is important because the crowd needs to reach a large number before it can be used for crowdsourcing projects: "the optimum size of a user-base for crowdsourcing purposes is around five thousand people." (Howe, 2008). That being said, there is no formal evidence indicating that crowdsourcing projects involving fewer than five thousand people are destined to fail.

Although 5,000 season subscribers is a lofty number, I believe this is an achievable number because, as I mentioned before, the Vancouver Whitecaps are going to need to expand their marketing efforts. With the need to fill in the approximate twenty thousand seats within BC Place, the club will be looking to reach as many people as possible. This will most likely increase traffic to their website because most people go to research topics or issues, or in this case sports teams, on the Internet. With what I believe will be an increase in website traffic over the next couple of seasons leading up to 2011, there is an opportunity to build a vibrant online community.

There are a few of things that fall in their favour regarding the potentiality of building this online community. First, their target demographic is males aged eighteen to thirty-five (R. McKee, personal communication, June 5, 2009). This is a perfect demographic because they are a very web savvy bunch, so the concept of online forums should not be foreign to them. In 2007 there was a Canadian Internet User Survey that was done and it found that 90% of males aged sixteen to forty-four used the Internet, from any location, in the past twelve months (Statistics Canada, 2007). While the age category is a little outside of the eighteen to thirty-five range, I believe it is fairly telling since the range is not very far off.

Second, while still relatively small, some of the outside forums on have proven fruitful in discussions about Vancouver Whitecaps organizational activity. On one online forum, I have witnessed discussions on the Vancouver Whitecaps' sustainability efforts and how the club could improve on them (The Vancouver Southsiders Forums, n.d.). On another forum I saw a thread dedicated to what jerseys the Vancouver Whitecaps could use in their inaugural 2011 season. Inside the thread were some nice and well-put together submissions. These are promising results, especially when looking forward to when the Vancouver Whitecaps will enjoy an even larger following.

Third, currently the most successful marketing channels for the Vancouver Whitecaps are mostly technology and social media based. The organization was quick to jump on the Twitter, Facebook and YouTube bandwagon, and Google searches and Google Ads have been big drivers of traffic to the MLS website (R. McKee, personal communication, June 5, 2009). Traditional print has not been providing as large an effect as those done online (R. McKee, personal communication, June 5, 2009). This fact

further strengthens the argument that having an online forum for fans to converse would be welcomed since the Internet is where a lot of the fans are going to find information regarding the Vancouver Whitecaps.

Finally, like most sports franchises, the Vancouver Whitecaps consider their fans to be of utmost importance. But I feel the Vancouver Whitecaps are doing a superior job than most others because they are looking to be actively involved in fans' lives. For example, when the club achieved success with their MLS bid, it threw a party inviting all the season ticket holders. Ryan McKee, the Vancouver Whitecaps Manager of Marketing, said it very much had a family feel to it. Also, with McKee's direct communication with the club's most dedicated fans, it further shows the Vancouver Whitecaps' desire to keep the fans involved.

The inclusion is not without some concerns though. For example, while the main demographic for the Vancouver Whitecaps' fan base is males aged eighteen to thirty-five, a number of children and families attend the games and enjoy the game of soccer as well, and they cannot be forgotten when discussing the franchise's future. If children are roaming the Vancouver Whitecaps' website and stumble across foul language on the online forums, this could be damaging to the reputation of the club. There would be regulations required to keep such language and/or content from being published. But that brings in a whole new set of problems.

Regulation should most be determined by the members themselves. They determine how they would best work and how the site should flow. If too many regulations are imposed, this could deter certain members from becoming involved.

These issues cannot be ignored. Children are important to the sustainability of the franchise, but so is a relatively unregulated environment where members feel they can express their feelings and talents without fear of repercussions. Going forward, the Vancouver Whitecaps would have to address these issues, and almost undoubtedly other unforeseen issues as well.

Overall though, I believe the Vancouver Whitecaps are very well suited to incorporate a forum into their online presence, and in a way they already have. I believe they should increase exposure to it though, and go as far as encourage members to visit it, register to it and engage in conversation on it. Such an activity is very much aligned with the franchise's goals.

3.2.2 Webmaster

Right now the franchise does not run an online forum on their website, so the organization does not employ someone to oversee any forum(s). But because they have a website that is multi-layered and consistently being updated with new content, the organization has a dedicated team towards maintaining the website. Therefore it is my belief that adding a functioning forum for members to communicate would not be difficult. It might even be able to be done without additional employees.

As for the regulation of the boards, this responsibility can be handed off to members of the crowd. Many forums and sites rely on this self-regulation to function with as little cost as possible. For example, Wikipedia is the largest online encyclopaedia, and it relies on its users to not only provide the content which makes it so valuable, but also to police its pages to make sure any vandalism is quickly erased.

3.2.3 Understood product

Soccer is a form of sports entertainment that can be watched either in person or on television. The concept is simple: whichever team scores more goals than the other team wins the game. It “is the most popular sport in the world” (Dunning, 1999) therefore it is a product that is understood by many people, not just in Vancouver but also around the world.

But the product that sports franchises give to their fans does not end with what is done on the field. The game itself is only part of the value package, but this is also known, directly or indirectly, by fans themselves. Most sporting events will have entertainment packed into every spare moment of a fan’s experience to increase value. And in some sports the experience begins much earlier and ends much later than the scheduled time of the game. For example, Ryan McKee envisions a fan’s experience of coming to a home game at BC Place in 2011 to begin in the streets outside the stadium (R. McKee, personal communication, June 5, 2009). Tailgating is a large part of the experience at football stadiums across America, and McKee would like to see something similar to that happen here as well. In fact, McKee would ideally like to see a street party outside the stadium before the game begins. Here he envisions bands playing and fans involved in multiple activities. By the time the fans enter into the stadium they are fully immersed in the experience, which would continue while the match is being played.

McKee’s vision is not out of the ordinary. Sports teams want to engage fans as early and as often as possible. I believe fans understand this because, we continually see sporting events turned into large spectacles. Stoppages in play are dominated by music and promotions, halftime is usually reserved for some kind of act to entertain the

attending crowd, and a plethora of food is typically available to patrons. If one were to ask fans of any sport what they would expect attending a live game, I believe most would say many of the things I have just listed.

3.3 Synthesis

The above run-through of the Vancouver Whitecaps organization leads me to believe that they are an organization that not only can benefit from crowdsourcing, but are also in a position to do so. With the move to BC Place and the successful MLS bid, the Vancouver Whitecaps are in a unique position in their franchise's history. They will be expanding their fan base, which helps the Vancouver Whitecaps achieve crowdsourcing candidacy by being able to check off having a "large" crowd. And while they may not be able to check off "means to communication" and "protection against cascades" yet, these are things they can deal with when the time arises. They have the capabilities to achieve them in the future, and that is all that matters.

From an organizational standpoint they meet all the standards that make them crowdsourcing capable. They have the potential for having an active and vibrant online community, access to Internet-savvy employees is either already available to them or easily accessible, and their product is well understood by their fans. The Vancouver Whitecaps have the organizational resources and crowd characteristics to make them a good candidate to set up, promote, and take advantage of crowdsourcing projects.

4: Marketing ideas for the Vancouver Whitecaps crowd

Given that it has been determined that the Vancouver Whitecaps would be a suitable candidate for crowdsourcing it would be useful to discuss what kind of projects would be best for the Vancouver Whitecaps to undertake. It is my recommendation that the first few projects be simple. This is for three reasons. First, it is not “because the crowd can’t handle complicated [tasks] – they can – it’s because they haven’t decided if it’s worth doing them for you yet” (Powazek, 2007). Because it has not been fully determined that the crowd would be willing participants, it is best to include them in simple, more fun tasks at the beginning working up to larger more complex tasks in the future if the organization so desires.

Second, because the team only recently won the MLS expansion bid, they will be contending with a smaller crowd for the time being. Due to the smaller number of crowd members while attempting to expand their fan base, the club can still leverage the crowd by engaging them with the smaller, simpler and more fun tasks.

Third, if the projects happened to fail, there would be little lost. Assignment Zero really began to perfect its crowdsourcing projects only after it launched. There was a lot of learning involved. By beginning with smaller steps, not only would the club learn if the crowd wants to help out or not, it also can learn valuable lessons about how the crowd acts, what it likes doing, and how it wants the forums or site to flow so that it is more effective for them. The club can learn off of these things, among other things, without sacrificing complex tasks going left incomplete. I consider this a form of risk

management while also not hindering an organization's ability to learn and take advantage of crowdsourcing.

Finally, by getting the crowd to participate in simpler tasks there is a better chance at growing the crowd through buzz. This is because the simpler the task the more people that will be drawn to it because of their ability to participate in it. Therefore it is worthwhile for the company to begin small and work their way up in terms of what the crowd will participate in.

It is because of this that the first three ideas I will be presenting will be more simple than complex. That being said, the three ideas do build upwards in terms of significance. I first suggest having a fan photo section. While this currently exists on their Facebook fan page, I do not believe it is being effectively utilized and promoted. Second, I would introduce the idea of a contest to design the tickets within season ticket booklets. The incentive can be minimal here, for instance, simply putting the name of the artist on the bottom of every ticket. Third, I am going to suggest a third jersey contest. There have been plenty of ideas seen on the boards on what certain fans believe the Vancouver Whitecaps jersey should look like when debuting in the MLS, which helped me spawn the idea of adding a third jersey through the form of a contest. Finally, I will propose asking the crowd about different marketing objectives. For example, the Vancouver Whitecaps are going to be looking to re-brand the team for their MLS debut.

These four ideas are simply a beginning. All four have potential to add value to the franchise while increasing fans' connections to the team through increased participation. But the most important lesson to be taken away from this exercise is that

the crowd has many different uses, talents and smarts that can be taken advantage of in a non-malicious, almost cooperative method.

4.1 Fan photos

I want to start with the relatively harmless and simple task of fans submitting photos. How the photos are used is up to the Vancouver Whitecaps, but whatever they choose should be *clearly* stated to the photographers/members participating.

Transparency is key here because the club does not want to seem as if they are taking advantage of the crowd. The incentive needed would not have to be large. For example, a weekly contest where the winning photo and the photographer's name are posted on the front page of the website. There could also be a reward involving the Vancouver Whitecaps or some Vancouver Whitecaps swag, for instance, two tickets to an upcoming game or a Vancouver Whitecaps t-shirt. Much like the Threadless.com example, I would allow the crowd to vote on which they believe is the best photo.

The process for submitting photos and voting on photos would be relatively simple so that there would be minimal complication. I suggest having an entire sub-forum dedicated to this weekly photo contest. The process can be much like the Threadless.com example where staff quickly vets the submissions to make sure they qualify by passing a simple list of rules. From there they are automatically uploaded to the forum where each photo can be rated. Every member is only able to vote once, and the results and comments in the thread are hidden from view to help protect against a cascade from happening. At the conclusion of every week a winner will be crowned and posted on the website. Much like Threadless.com, I believe the Vancouver Whitecaps should be able to use the winning photos if they would like to, for instance, in promotional ads or posters.

While seemingly trivial it can have positive effects for the club in the form of photographs to use in upcoming and future ad campaigns. The value here lies in gaining access to more choice, in terms of photos that can be used, for little to no extra cost. Even if a multitude of photos are submitted, by having the crowd vote on them, the evaluation work is outsourced to the community. In doing so, the company will gain valuable information regarding what particular photos catch the eyes of their fans. Using these photos, or photos similar to them, could help boost traditional print marketing, which has slumped when compared to the more web-based marketing efforts. Where the value lies here is fairly simple: gaining a perspective about what kind of print catches the consumers' eyes for, once again, little to no cost. Previously, in the ages before the Internet, gaining such a perspective would cost a company a large sum of money because focus groups would have to be done along with in-depth market research. This way the answers are shown to us through the users simply rating their favourite photographs.

4.2 Season ticket designs

The next idea has more significance attached to it, but I believe that it is still a worthy task for the crowd to perform and it will save the company more in terms of costs. The task is to design the tickets that are handed out in the season ticket booklets. Again, I do not believe the incentive for such a contest would need to be large. Promising to give the artist/designer credit would be a good incentive, and possibly even a small cash reward. These incentives would likely pale in comparison to the costs of what the club would have to pay to have the tickets designed by a professional.

This task is a once a year process that I believe fans would be willing to participate in. Access to graphic programs is widely available and there are a lot of

people that may not design for a profession, but enjoy the process as a hobby, much like photography. This presents an opportunity for the Vancouver Whitecaps to take advantage of these dedicated and talented individuals.

Much like the photo contest described above, there would have to be a small set of criteria that would need to be met before it is deemed a successful submission, such as no offensive material like swearing or nudity. Regardless of what rules are imposed, the Vancouver Whitecaps would likely receive multiple submissions thus dwarfing what one designer could achieve in the same time frame, and for a fraction of the cost. The crowd would be given a time frame in which they would work within.

It is conceivable that the Vancouver Whitecaps could make club photos public for the crowd to manipulate. It would knock down a barrier many amateur designers might face thus impeding them from participating: a lack of material to work with. With a crop of photos to work with, these designers would simply need their own talents to take part.

Because this task is more important, the club could decide on the winner, but they could also pick the winner much like the fan photo contest listed above. Because it is a once-a-year process, season ticket holders could become familiar with a specific date in which they would have to vote on the design of the tickets they are paying for year after year.

The value of such a contest or process would be found in the freeing up of resources that would have otherwise been used to create these designs, resources such as money and employees' time and effort.

4.3 Third jersey contest

There is something that I have noticed about not only online soccer fans, but online sports fans in general, and that is that they enjoy displaying pictures of either their favourite players or what their preferred jersey should be. If the Vancouver Whitecaps were to have a contest for a third club jersey I believe they would draw quite a few submissions.

A third jersey is one that differs from typical home and away jerseys. The jersey would be of different colours, or will have a different design. Either way, there are distinguishing features to the jersey that make it distinct. The Colorado Rapids of the MLS currently have a third jersey (Colorado Rapids Website, 2008), and I believe that the Vancouver Whitecaps should do the same, and they should do so with the help of the crowd.

I believe having such a contest or process would have benefits for the team, three-fold. First, having a third jersey could increase jersey sales. Die-hard fans would snatch up the jersey so they could own all three, and regular fans would buy them if they looked good. I do not believe it would be seen as a money-grab necessarily because many teams have third jerseys or retro jerseys of some kind. As it can be seen, the potential for a third jersey is certainly available and I think the Vancouver Whitecaps should offer how it looks to the crowd.

Second, the crowd's stamp would be put on the team giving them more connection to the team, or the team more connection to the city depending on how you look at it. Either way, a part of the team would have been created by the crowd, which is more significant than paying a professional designer.

Third, once again, would be cost savings. By employing the crowd's creative talents and willingness to provide for their team, the Vancouver Whitecaps can save money not having to buy a professional designer to make their third jersey. Again, this frees up some of the club's resources that would have otherwise been working on the same project.

Much like the above contests, there would be a minimalist set of rules, but aside from that the crowd would simply be creating and submitting different designs for either the club or crowd to decide upon which one is the chosen design. Again, if the crowd was decided upon to chose the winning submission, there would be less chance of a failing design because they will have picked it out. The Vancouver Whitecaps could once again take note of the Threadless.com example and include a button that members can check to say whether or not they would buy the jersey. This would give the club a better idea of how many jerseys to order to handle initial demand. Doing so would lower the costs of ordering and lessen the amount of possibly wasteful inventory by being more precise than simply guessing how many jerseys will be bought by fans.

4.4 Commonalities

There are two common themes throughout all three of these ideas that should be mentioned. First, all of the ideas get the fans more involved. By this I mean that the fans are not only thinking about the team more, but also they are helping the team out. The fans think about the team more often because their spare time will be spent attempting to take good photos or crop photos involving the Vancouver Whitecaps instead of something like watching the TV. Fans help out with the team because they are essentially

assisting in the construction of the website and possibly other marketing material released by the Vancouver Whitecaps.

Second, the fans would end up spending more time on the Vancouver Whitecaps website than if those ideas had not been implemented. This is because they will be more engaged thanks to the interactive nature of the whole site. The interaction does not stop with just the contests though. It is reinforced with the interactive nature of the forums as well. Discussion with fellow fans and those with a similar fascination with soccer can be enough to keep bringing people back day in and day out.

These two themes are important, especially the second one. This is because, on other sites where there are forums and other types of interaction with not only other members but also the company, there has been a noticeable increase in “users’ intent to purchase” (Cook, S., 2008). Another such site has claimed that, “as a marketing tool... [it] is now four times as effective as comparably priced television advertising” (Cook, S., 2008). Of course it was mentioned that any such advertising was done so discreetly, and the Vancouver Whitecaps should follow suit if they were to head in this direction.

Going back to the 4 Ps of marketing – product, price, place and promotion (Kotler, Keller, & Cunningham, 2006) – simply put, the above examples make for a more effective promotional tool. There is where the value lies in having these contests and forums being so engaging and interactive. Users spend more time on them, become more engaged with the organization and thus are more drawn to their products. This provides heightened if not new revenues to the club that it might not have achieved before using more traditional methods.

Not only will consumers buy more, but advertisers will be willing to pay more to place an ad campaign on the organization's website. In other words, another way of looking at how value could be created through such constant traffic to the Vancouver Whitecaps website is through increased advertising dollars. Other companies will see that more people are likely to buy more products on a site that is interactive and has consumers coming back consistently thus should be willing to pay more to be on that website.

5: Measuring success

Having goals to achieve is great, but it is hard to know whether those goals were achieved without some form of measurement. In other words, each goal should have a measurable standard it must live up to in order to determine if it was successful, and thus should be continued, or whether it failed and should be discontinued. Below I will go over goals that I believe each crowdsourcing idea should be judged upon.

5.1 Fan photos

This idea is the simplest of the three, and because of this I propose fairly achievable goals. It was stated that the value from fans submitting their photos came from being able to choose from them for upcoming promotional ad campaigns. It should be noted that participation in this contest, or even just to submit photos, would require users to log into the site. This is why I believe there are two different measurements that can help determine whether the project would be a success.

The first measurement would be a determining whether or not there is a spike in visits to the website. For instance, if the contest winner is uploaded to the front page on a particular day every week, one could determine that if there was a consistent spike on that one day that the contest was gaining notice. Or if there is a noticeable spike in the visitors after game days coupled with a noticeable spike in the number of photo submissions as well. I believe a 10% increase in site traffic on the day where the winning submission is

posted to the website would be considered a victory regarding this initiative, especially considering its low cost to the organization.

The second measurement could be the number of photos deemed worthy of consideration within future Vancouver Whitecaps ad campaigns. Assuming a typical soccer season is 26 weeks long (Vancouver Whitecaps FC, n.d.), and using Sturgeon's Law, "90 percent of everything is crap" (Howe, 2008) thus leaving ten percent of good material, as a rough approximate, then if the Vancouver Whitecaps receive three (ten percent of twenty-six is 2.6, rounded upwards equals three) submissions in their inaugural season that they deem worthy of consideration for promotional use, I would consider this a success.

Of course there is plenty of room for other suggestions the Vancouver Whitecaps could use to help determine the success of a crowdsourcing project or not, but these two are good beginnings, which at the very least, can be built upon.

5.2 Season tickets design

Here the proposal was to have the crowd help create the design that is to appear on the tickets that season ticket holders receive. The tickets would be designed differently from regular publicly sold tickets therefore differentiating them to help show season ticket holders that the organization values their commitment.

To conclude whether or not the design contest for the season tickets was successful or not once again can come down to two major measurements: First, the participation rate of season ticket holders when they vote on the submissions, and second,

the number of suitable submissions exceed the number of submissions they would have received from professional designers.

I believe that the participation rate of the season ticket holders, through the form of a vote on which design they like most, is a telling statistic on whether or not the season ticket holders, as a whole, collectively care for such an option. If the voter turn out were above 70%, I would be convinced that the season ticket holders care enough to continue onwards with such a contest.

That being said, if the group does not deem all the submissions professional enough, then no matter how large the voter turn out is, the project would be considered a failure. I believe this can be achieved by including an option in the vote sent out to season ticket holders indicating that the submissions are not good enough. This could be done subtly by adding a voting option for last season's ticket design, or it could be done bluntly by adding an option simply stating that no designs are acceptable. I would say that if the percentage of season ticket holders who deemed the crop of submissions unworthy of print reached 25%, then the project would be considered a failure due to lack of quality submissions.

5.3 Third jersey contest

This contest is the one I deem most significant because it involves the highest risk of costing the organization money because it involves printing jerseys, promoting them and hoping that they sell. If they do not sell then they would be wasteful inventory. There were three reasons I determined that this kind of contest could help out the Vancouver Whitecaps. Those reasons were as follows: the third jerseys could increase jersey sales,

the fans could feel a greater connection to the team because they were a part of how they represent themselves, and it could save them money by not having to employ professional designers. It is these reasons that are the basis for the three measurements to help determine this project's success.

First, the Vancouver Whitecaps could see an increase in new revenue with the emergence of a third jersey, but this would only ring true if they were able to sell more jerseys to exceed costs. The website Threadless.com employs an "I would buy this" button on their t-shirts so they can better determine demand when ordering t-shirts, and I think the Vancouver Whitecaps should do the same. When prompting voters to choose between jersey designs, the Vancouver Whitecaps staff could include an "I would buy this" button. This way they could receive information on whether or not there would be enough orders to justify printing a large number of jerseys, regardless of which design won. As long as profits exceeded costs then it is revenue the organization would not have seen otherwise.

Second, I believe the fans would appreciate being involved in a significant part of the team. The jerseys the team wears is a part of how they represent the organization and the city, so I believe letting the fans have a say in how their third jerseys looked would be welcomed. Here I would look towards voter turnout to determine success. If the organization saw a total of ten thousand voters, I would consider the contest an overwhelming success.

Third, if the number of quality submissions were not high enough, then it would be safe to say that the project was a failure. I believe this could be determined by looking at the numbers of those who, when voting on their favourite submissions, also said they

would buy the jersey. Again, using Sturgeon's Law as a loose measure, if ten percent of all submissions received enough votes that, if the jersey were to win the contest its revenues would exceed the costs of producing the jersey, then I would consider it a successful project.

6: Conclusion

The Vancouver Whitecaps have a long and rich history, and with its most recent accomplishment, becoming an expansion team for the best soccer league in North America, the organization has reason to be excited about its future. The club will be introducing a new brand, a new website, and will be moving into a newly renovated BC Place, which will have four times the capacity of its current home field. The successful MLS bid puts them into a unique position regarding crowdsourcing as well, a position I think they should take advantage of.

The crowd that the Vancouver Whitecaps attract is well suited to participate in crowdsourcing projects. They have a deep, passionate adoration for the commonality that brings them all together. The city of Vancouver, where the Vancouver Whitecaps call home, is an extremely diverse city, not only from an ethnic perspective, but also in terms of education, jobs, and pastimes, to name a few. Also, Ryan McKee, a key component within the Vancouver Whitecaps organization, is already quite involved in the cultivation of, and interaction with, fans. This is of course crucial to building trust with members of the crowd. These are all things the Vancouver Whitecaps already possess, and moving forward towards the expansion the club fills in the rest of the crowd characteristics checklist.

The crowd characteristics that the Vancouver Whitecaps will be able to fill out moving forward will be such things as the size of the crowd, means to the crowd's communication, protection against cascades, and the incentives used to rewards

participants of the crowdsourcing projects. The size will come because the Vancouver Whitecaps will be creating a large marketing push over the next two years to peak interest. Many people will be exposed to Vancouver soccer that had previously not been interested. In the future, the Vancouver Whitecaps are looking to overhaul their website. I propose they include an online forum on the site to keep their fans' communications close to home. The pre-production portion of a crowdsourcing project is where the protection again cascades will be determined. That is where the proper incentive for the project will be determined as well.

The ideas that were proposed in this paper – fan photos, season ticket designs, and third jersey designs – were merely examples of what sorts of projects could be accomplished with crowdsourcing. As stated earlier, the most important lesson to be taken away from this exercise is that the crowd has many different uses, talents and smarts that can be taken advantage of in a non-malicious, almost cooperative method.

The main concept of this paper is that the fans that the Vancouver Whitecaps rely on to survive can play a more involved role within the franchise. This role will help cut costs, free up resources, and potentially bring in new revenues that the club had not realized before hand. The chance to begin building towards a cooperative, more online community-based fan base is right now.

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