

CrowdFlower cultivating office-free work styles

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CrowdFlower

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The San Francisco firm will take another step in that direction Monday with the launch of a Business Listing Verification service that lets people ranging from stay-at-home moms to refugee camp dwellers cash in on idle moments.

The service essentially parses and distributes to many hands the daunting task of checking to make sure each business contact in a colossal database is accurate.

CrowdFlower does this by using online labor distribution tools such as Amazon's Mechanical Turk and adding to the mix safeguards to ensure accurate results.

"There has been this model of everyone driving to a building where they have someone watch over them, hire them and fire them," CrowdFlower chief executive Lukas Biewald said.

"The Internet has this potential to democratize work."

As computers become core to business operations, work done digitally has growing potential to be sent directly to people who can tend to tasks away from overhead-causing office buildings and management layers, he explained.

CrowdFlower takes tedious big jobs -- such as checking business contact lists -- breaks them into small tasks that can be accomplished in minutes and then pays per piece.

For example, someone might earn 20 cents for confirming the address of a restaurant or coffee shop during a television commercial break or while a baby is sleeping.

"What I love about it is that it gives anyone access to work," Biewald said. "There are people that want to capitalize on downtime, or who have trouble with traditional kinds of employment."

Since launching in 2007, CrowdFlower has been parsing and farming out micro-jobs, such as finding products that match precise descriptions or gathering menus from every restaurant possible.

"We focus on short tasks that people can do in their extra time and that are verifiable by us," Biewald said.

Demand was so strong from businesses interested in updating contact databases that CrowdFlower created the service being launched on Monday.

"If a business has a huge database of contacts, we can get it done in days when it might take them weeks," Biewald said.

"A lot of companies that sell these lists have let the quality deteriorate over time. If you actually drive to a location and the business has moved, that is a big problem."

He highlighted the outdated contact list problem with US Small Business Association figures showing that slightly more than 550,000 new US firms opened for [business](#) in 2009 and nearly 661,000 closed that same year.

CrowdFlower "harnesses a scalable" labor pool of more than 500,000 people in over 150 countries.

"I've learned how much having a job means to people," Biewald said.

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