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CUSTOMER CO-CREATION PROJECTS AND THE SOCIAL MEDIA: THE CASE OF BARILLA OF ITALY

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates a social media-enabled customer co-creation project at the front-end of innovation (FEI) in a well-known, large-scale food manufacturer. It sheds light on the role of social media technology in transforming the characteristics of FEI in terms of boundaries and knowledge distance. What type of exploratory or exploitative innovation ideas does a project of this sort enable? How did the project evolve? What lessons can be learned from this project? A longitudinal case study of Barilla was carried out through two rounds of interviews with Marketing, Business Dev. & Innovation, and Digital Communication managers. The evidence gathered highlights the emergent evolution of this customer co-creation project from an initial stage of idea exploitation to a more complex and fruitful stage in which both exploitation and exploration were simultaneously accomplished.

Keywords: innovation; customer co-creation; social media; crowdsourcing; front-end innovation; case study.

THE RISE OF CO-CREATION AND THE MANAGERIAL CHALLENGE

Firms rarely innovate alone. The innovation process is an interactive relationship between producers, users and other actors. These two statements characterize our current understanding of the innovation process (Piller et al., 2010). The term ‘open innovation’ has recently been used to illustrate a system where innovation is not performed solely within a firm, but in a cooperative way with external players (Chesbrough, 2003). Based on the idea that the customer is a fundamental source of knowledge for innovation, ‘customer co-creation’ defines an approach to innovation whereby customers take an active part in designing a new offering (for extended reviews of the active role of customers in the innovation process, see Baldwin & von Hippel, 2011).

The term co-creation is not new, but it is now receiving more attention by both practitioners and scholars. This is largely driven by an ever-increasing use of the Internet and social media tools, as companies endeavor to differentiate themselves from competitors. Innovation is even more critical in a context of prolonged economic volatility. Therefore, co-creation and social media for innovation are issues that deserve further attention to help management and organizations improve their innovative capability. Several questions remain open in these fields and their possible integration is invoked (Barczak, 2012). Managers face the following practical challenges:

- To what extent can customers be creative?
- What tools and processes enable effective co-creation efforts with customers?
- What strategies are effective in using social media for innovation?
- What types of social media work best for a specific innovation effort (i.e. incremental, really new or radical)?

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This article investigates a customer co-creation project at the front-end of the innovation, which is enabled by social media, in a large Italian food manufacturer. In so doing, the authors offer practitioners in managerial positions a unique perspective. Indeed, Managers often focus on choosing the right social media tool to carry out a certain activity. However, the decision is not one-shot: the project is a dynamic situation, where the customer, the firm and the platform mutually interact causing the project to change over time (Martini et al. 2013). The case of Barilla invites decision makers to focus on what types of ideas – exploitative and/or exploratory - can be gathered by means of a specific tool and how a project can change over time.

CUSTOMERS, FRONT-END INNOVATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The FEI process centers on two essential activities: (1) generating novel concepts and ideas and (2) selecting specific concepts and ideas to be pursued further (O’Hern & Rindfleisch 2009). Generating ideas is a more open and creative task, thus it affords a greater degree of freedom than selecting from a predefined set of ideas. Idea generation presents a firm with the main challenge of how to incentivize users to transfer their innovative ideas. Some companies promise cash rewards or licensing contracts for innovative ideas, others build on non-monetary acknowledgments promising peer or company recognition and facilitating a pride-of-authorship effect. Companies often provide rewards or recognition only to the ‘best’ of these submissions, thus employing a competitive mechanism to foster and encourage user innovation (Piller & Walcher, 2006). The nature of competition should encourage more or better users to participate, as it should inspire their creativity and increase the quality of submissions.

In order to identify and select ideas with the highest potential, literature contributions frequently refer to idea screening and evaluation. Methods of screening ideas generally

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involve customers themselves taking steps in evaluation with management having the final word. As the number of ideas may be potentially very large, the challenge is to find an efficient method of selecting them. For example, Toubia and Flores (2007) describe several idea-screening algorithms that perform this selection adaptively based on evaluations made by previous consumers.

Customer Co-creation and Social Media

For some time, market researchers have tried to tackle the issue of co-creation through the development of focus groups or in-context scenarios (in-home, in-shop and other on-site locations) that enable them to observe consumer behavior closely. Close observation of consumers aims at achieving a deeper understanding of their behavior, although a certain number of scholars rise doubts on those methods to generate radical innovation. There always seems to be a clear delineation between the roles of researchers, marketers, product/brand developers and designers, and that of the consumer. In addition to conventional methods, many companies are starting to adopt social media to develop co-creation initiatives (Burghin et al., 2011). Social media can be defined as a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Social media represents a new trend as it changes the rules of communication with customers by allowing firms to engage in timely and direct end-consumer contact at relatively low costs and higher levels of efficiency than through more traditional communication tools. In the field of customer co-creation, the use of social media represents a great opportunity for company management. It allows them to shorten the distance between company and users, thereby increasing and strengthening user involvement and engagement in the innovation process (Piller et al. 2012). Indeed, using different contact channels can be a worthwhile and

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profitable strategy for firms wishing to be active wherever their customers are present, thus becoming part of their life. However, not many firms are able to act comfortably in a world where consumers can speak so freely with each other and businesses have increasingly less control over the information available about them in cyberspace (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social media tools now play an important role in transforming the characteristics of FEI, changing its boundaries and knowledge distances, and making it more efficient and effective under certain circumstances (see e.g. Afuah & Tucci, 2012, Bogers et al., 2010; Jespersen, 2010). In fact, the pervasiveness of social media and the fact that some media have more than 100 million users (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn) makes them a large virtual ecosystem where companies and their customers can engage in a common and equal creative effort. As such, online channels like communities, discussion forum, blogs, virtual worlds and so on hold great promise for the implementation of customer co-creation. Several examples of customer co-creation enabled by social media are reported in the literature (Antorini et al., 2012). Literature is in its embryonic stage and just moving from the *what* question to the *how* question.

THE BARILLA CUSTOMER CO-CREATION PROJECT

A longitudinal case study, consistent with the explorative aim of this work, was carried out to investigate contextual specificities. Table 1 reports on the sources of evidence for this case study.

Barilla, the company selected, is highly innovative. Every year, it launches approximately 50 new products and is involved in about 150 innovation projects that see various actors both inside and outside the company actively interacting.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

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Originally established in 1877 as a bread and pasta shop in Parma, Barilla is one of today’s top Italian food producers. It is a leader in the pasta business worldwide, in the pasta sauce business in continental Europe, in the bakery product business (which is the focus of this case study) in Italy and in the crisp bread business in Scandinavia (fig. 1).

Barilla exports to more than 100 countries and employs more than 15,000 people. In 2012, it registered net sales of €3.990 billion; EBITDA of €433 million; and net earnings of €60 million. The company has been managed by one family’s entrepreneurial experience for over 130 years and is currently being run by fourth generation siblings.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

The *Mulino Bianco* (in English, ‘White Mill’) brand was created to launch a new line of oven-baked products in 1975. The concepts of wellness and healthy eating were captured by associations with nature and Old World traditions. The word *Mulino* (Mill) represented a simple and old-fashioned way of making wheat products, whereas *Bianco* (White) attributed the psychological perception of purity, force and brightness. Despite the fact that White Mill’s marketing strategy is imbued with “good old day” values, Barilla is a modern and highly innovative global company with a special focus on social, environmental and economic sustainability. The company’s innovation portfolio, which is constantly revised on the basis of defined priorities, is made up of about 150 projects at different stages of advancement that should be finalized within the next two to three years. In 2010, Barilla invested €42 million in Research & Development and employed about 250 people in research, technological and product innovation, and quality control (source barillagroup.com).

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THE CO-CREATION PROJECT’S JOURNEY

In this section, we analyze the “In the Mill I Wish For” (from now on, MIW) initiative, a customer co-creation project, based on a Web 2.0 platform. The case is described using the dimensions developed by Antonacopolou (2010):

- Place (space, context, cultural and social conditions),
- Procedures, both formal and informal (rules, resources, and actions),
- Purpose (intention),
- Principles (values and assumptions),
- Practitioners (actors).

It is a longitudinal case study as it reports past and presents details of the above dimensions. Past characteristics are those emerged from the first round of interviews, after one-year from the practice introduction. Present characteristics are those emerged from the second round of interviews, from October to December 2011, one year later the first round.

The Purposes

MIW started in 2009 with the following main purposes:

- To gather all brand-lovers in an organized online community leveraging several examples of spontaneous online fan-clubs founded around specific White Mill products. Examples include *Pan di Stelle* cookies or *Soldino* snacks with their cult-like following, even though they are no longer in production. The Facebook page titled “Give us *Soldino* back” counted about 10,000 subscribers in 2009 and *Pan di Stelle* fans numbered about 700,000. To capitalize on this presence and overcome online fragmentation, White Mill consolidated its online presence through the creation of Facebook pages for every main product and through the creation of MIW to interact

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directly with customers, thereby transforming the brand-customer relationship from one-to-many to many-to-many. In the Digital Communication Manager’s (DC Manager) own words: “*By bringing together various Pan di Stelle Facebook fan pages, we gave a house on the Web for many Pan di Stelle lovers. Through MIW, we want to create a communication and relationship platform to give all people a voice*”.

- To obtain feedback on White Mill initiatives and glean new insights from the online community as well as to gather ideas from the community. Through this platform, customers can submit new ideas specifically related to the White Mill business area to the company. Other users subsequently voted on these ideas and the White Mill marketing department considered winning ideas for implementation.

The DC Manager speaks of “recruiting” people to engage in a new relationship with the brand. To drive engagement, the company nurtures and celebrates contents and ideas from the community. For example, those who provide ideas which are chosen by the company for implementation are the focus of a “celebration day” when the idea is presented during big media event. Regarding the kind of insights the company expected from MIW, this Manager admitted in the first round of interviews that: “*We don’t expect breakthrough ideas from our customers online. MIW represents more of an innovation in communication than a tool for involving consumers in innovation. We receive precious insights by listening to our customers, but these insights are necessarily incremental in nature. We pursue radical innovation by activating completely different search practices, going far from our business and from what we know. Crowdsourcing is not useful when you have scarce information and do not have a clear idea of what you are looking for*”.

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The Place

MIW is an online consumer portal where White Mill customers can share ideas and suggestions about the company’s products, promotions, initiatives and social and environmental commitment, among other issues. MIW takes the concept of crowdsourcing and opens it up to any customer upon registration. MIW integrates and cross promotes White Mill’s web presence, which was derived from disorganized, organically-grown initiatives. MIW also has a Facebook account which opens up a channel for customers who prefer Facebook for communication. MIW is linked bi-directionally to the institutional brand’s webpage.

MIW includes a blog, which is also published in RSS (Really Simple Syndication) format, where different White Mill employees write about and discuss newly implemented projects or launched products, as well as how customer ideas or suggestions are handled. Customer comments are enabled based on accepted Internet etiquette (networketiquette.net), which also makes up the guidelines used for all communication enabled on MIW. As a result, the company may intervene whenever the accepted rules are not followed, as cutting off “flame wars” is a priority.

The Principles

According to the DC Manager, there are three main principles driving MIW: “*Firstly, MIW is not supposed to be an institutional company website, and certainly not a “brochure website”. Indeed, it does not talk to customers; on the contrary, it listens. Secondly, its aim is not to teach, but to learn. Thirdly, it is an operational platform aimed at promoting actions more than talk.*” These principles are clearly stated on MIW’s homepage with the slogan “*What matters here is your voice*” Regarding the platform’s operational nature, the DC Manager explains: “*MIW is not about explaining why our products are better than others, rather it is*

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about engaging customers in open and active conversation, finding out what they might find interesting and enjoyable. In fact, a key element in the success of this initiative is fostering customer participation, leveraging the so-called intrinsic motivation of community members, which has more to do with obtaining a reward from the activity itself than with its actual outcome.”

There is actually a fourth basic principle, which frames the entire project, i.e. maintaining genuine and sincere interaction with customers. These guiding principles were defined at the beginning of the project and represent the pillars of this entire initiative. The MIW homepage reads: “Tell us everything and don’t worry. We aren’t prejudiced. We are ready to get in the game and listen to all your suggestions, including any which may not seem to fit our current business”.

The Procedures

Two types of procedures have been identified: front-end and backstage. The former defines how companies collect information and ideas from customers; the latter defines how White Mill employees manage such information and ideas.

Front-end procedures require users to create an account in order to submit an idea or comment and vote on others’ ideas. Upon registration, they have the option of searching for ideas or directly submitting their own. Ideas are collected methodically according to areas (e.g. products, promotions, packaging, environment and social issues, among others) and thematic fields (e.g. new ingredients, new recipes and new products in the product area). The community then votes on ideas and White Mill marketing staff considers the highest rankings (top ten) ideas for implementation. A tutor is available to help users in this process. The tutor provides suggestions on how to make ideas clearer and increase chances of being chosen by the community; however, the tutor does not make any judgments about the quality of ideas.

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The tutor can also open new discussion threads and delete inappropriate posts to safeguard the company’s reputation.

A new procedure was recently introduced on MIW to elicit new ideas more effectively from community members. Each brand manager launches a quantitative and/or qualitative poll on a certain issue. The Marketing Research Unit then identifies users for involvement in the poll for a representative sampling of the population. Customers are rewarded with indirect financial incentives (free products) based on how much they participate in polls.

Initially, back-stage procedures only saw ideas selected by community members entered into evaluation and feasibility processes. This was based on the assumption that decision-makers do not have time to wade through thousands of ideas. At a later stage, ideas identified by the marketing staff also entered into evaluation, thus introducing a new top-down procedure of direct selection of ideas. According to this procedure, called “Search-Examine-Find”, each brand manager can choose an idea, regardless of its success in the community. This procedure aims at limiting the online community’s conservative attitude, which will be described in a following section.

In order to guarantee the company’s full engagement with MIW at all levels, three types of procedures were set in place: weekly review meetings involving Directors, the Business Development and Innovation Unit and the Digital Communication Unit; a monthly newsletter sent to the Business Development and Innovation Unit, Marketing Research Unit and Trade; and periodical reviews involving the whole company.

The Practitioners

Practitioners involved in MIW can fall into two main categories. External users, essentially White Mill customers, interact with the application from outside the company; internal users, meaning White Mill personnel, use the platform at several levels from inside the company.

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Interaction is naturally customers-brand/brand-customers and is understood as only mediated by the platform.

Although participation is open to all, external users are mainly White Mill customers and brand lovers. From participation data after one year of activity, 27% of external users are men and 73% are women; the average age is 35.

At the first round of interviews, internal users were initially members of the Digital Communication Unit who had designed and implemented the application. An idea was submitted to the relevant brand manager for evaluation only after it had been selected by external users (through online voting) and examined by the Digital Communication Unit. Systematic internal users were Digital Communication employees with various functions: tracing selected ideas by informing external users on work in progress, running the blogs, monitoring correct use of the application, examining the most voted ideas and randomly analyzing ideas that had been discarded by the community, among other functions.

At the second round of interviews, a change in internal users emerged. In fact, due to newly implemented procedures, i.e. Search-Examine-Find and polls on specific issues, brand managers and the marketing unit were stimulated to interact directly with the tool and use it to look for new ideas on specific themes of interest.

First results: Nostalgia Takes Over

MIW's first year of activity recorded about 4,120 ideas. Based on the votes received, two ideas were implemented in 2010, a third in 2011 and a fourth in 2013. The community seemed to be driven by people that strived to re-create the past by proposing re-editions of old products, old packaging and old gadgets, which were perhaps connected to their childhood. Several White Mill products have been on the market since the mid-seventies and the average age of the MIW users was 35 years old. Thus, the majority of community

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members were children in the 1970s. Having these same users vote on their favorite ideas seemed to have a conservative effect that essentially cut off more potentially innovative ideas. White Mill caters for the community’s “former children” who demonstrate genuine devotion to the brand by re-proposing old products and packaging in limited editions. The first two ideas to receive numerous votes and then be implemented in 2010 called for the re-edition of discontinued products, specifically Soldino (a pastry glazed with chocolate and with a chocolate small coin - literary “Soldino”- on the top) and Palicao (a cocoa cookie that melts in milk). For example, in the case of Soldino, the same person that launched the idea clearly addresses the “former children of the *snack and cartoon* generation”, as she defines her peers. As she claims in her post: “So, as nostalgic clamor for Soldino, why don’t you make it with a Euro on it? It’s proof that White Mill is a certainty that has accompanied us since we were children until now that we are parents. Everything goes away, but White Mill is still here!” This idea received 6,696 votes and was the first idea selected for implementation by the firm. The post asking for Palicao to return to the shelves sounds more like a prayer: “Please, I beg you! Do your best to make Palicao come back in the Olympus of White Mill productions! Many children of yesterday and today would be grateful to you! It’s a shame they were taken off the market, they were simply wonderful!” This idea received 7,500 votes and White Mill put Palicao and Soldino on sale again as limited editions. Recent posts lament that they would like Palicao and Soldino to come back permanently: “In the mill I wish for, there is the free market of Palicao”.

Nostalgic feelings for the old days also emerge in several posts that ask for re-editions of old products, gadgets and commercials, among other things. Having gained more than 1,000 votes so far, one idea represents this type of nostalgia quite well. It was considered by the firm as one the funniest ideas they had received. The consumer wishes for a sort of “Time

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Mill" - a virtual time-machine that would bring him back to his childhood. Indeed, the user's personal avatar seems to be a childhood picture of himself. He proposes a virtual game where the user can find old gadgets to exchange with 'former children' friends, a TV channel that would broadcast old commercials, and so on. White Mill takes such attachment to the old times by a good part of its customers seriously and gratifies them by means of ad-hoc initiatives, albeit without distorting the present brand. For example, the company recently activated a blog that is entirely dedicated to its gadgets. It is run by a person who has been dealing with White Mill gadgets and promotions since 1978.

Exploitative Ideas First, but Explorative Ones Emerging

In this first phase, the exploitative nature of this co-creation project clearly prevailed. However, despite the generally conservative nature of this online community, some non-traditional ideas were proposed. They were not highly voted on by the community but the marketing unit selected them for implementation. In spring 2009, two users proposed that White Mill support World Wildlife Fund (WWF) sites in Italy. The Marketing Manager responded that: "*The entire White Mill team liked this idea so much that we decided to implement it, even though it was not one of the top 10 most voted ideas. We contacted the WWF to figure out how we could work together to support WWF sites in Italy*". From this idea, three successful Facebook projects were started. For one project called "tree count" White Mill committed to planting one tree in a WWF site for each ten users that voted online for their favorite White Mill product in the "Fruit histories" line (milkshakes and fruit-cups). One week from the launch, 2,500 users had voted and 250 trees had been planted. After 20 days, the final target of planting a whole orchard had been reached and the competition now continues with new initiatives.

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The DC Manager interpreted this fact as a signal of MIW’s innovative potential, which needed to be empowered through new procedures and new professional roles. One year after the first, a second round of interviews with the DC Manager revealed that MIW’s explorative potential of co-creation practice is now emerging. When asked if MIW also had an explorative purpose, the DC Manager responded: “*Of course breakthrough ideas do also come out of MIW. How else would you define the idea of a White Mill themed amusement park? I don’t know if it will be carried out, but it is surely a mould-breaking idea!*”

PROJECT EVOLUTION

The MIW co-creation project features some characteristics (see table 2), such as Place and Principles, which have remained the same over time, whereas others, such as Purposes, Procedures and Practitioners have been changed.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

Such changes (i.e. extension of the platform’s former purposes, introduction of new procedures and inclusion of new categories of practitioners) promoted the MIW project’s ability to generate both radical and incremental innovation ideas.

However unexpected it may have been, the explorative potential of MIW did emerge from the beginning of its use. Company management may not have recognized this potentiality *a priori* due to the fact that the tool had been designed to involve customers and brand lovers, thus a narrowly defined community. MIW had been conceived for a “near search” and was not expected to find anything “distant”, that is to say a radically new idea. This explorative capability of the tool is connected to features of social media that can extend the potentiality of “near search” addressing an online community that is virtually infinite (Afuah & Tucci, 2012). The critical aspect lies in putting procedures in place to select or cream off contributions and practitioners inside the company that must be able to understand the

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potential innovativeness behind an idea. From this point of view, this change mainly involved backstage procedures with the double aim of limiting the online community’s conservative attitude (the Search-Examine-Find procedure) and increasing the whole company’s commitment. The company decided to dedicate more specialized employees, such as those working in the Business Development and Innovation Department. New employees were also hired in the Digital Communication Department, which went from two to seven people. In the first phase, DC Manager acted as a sort of “idea-router”, occasionally involving the relative Brand Manager, the Marketing Unit or the Business Development and Innovation Manager. In the second phase, use of the new “Search-Examine-Find” procedure and the launch of specific polls prompted Brand Managers and the Marketing Unit to interact directly with the tool and use it to look for new ideas on specific themes of interest. Indeed, White Mill management learned that selected managers and experts in specific fields are the ones that can usefully interact with customers and identify radically innovative ideas through this interaction. White Mill decision makers learned the importance of closely following the project’s evolution and acting accordingly. They realized they needed to introduce new procedures to expand the whole company’s commitment and carefully select a group of the appropriate type of employees to interact directly with customers.

As empirical evidence shows, the project was able to gather both incremental and radical innovation ideas concurrently. This aspect emerged over time as an unexpected outcome. Indeed, as pointed out previously, managers were initially rather skeptical about MIW’s innovative potential. This attitude may have been motivated by the difficulties managers often have in understanding the nature of and motivations behind users that feed social media systems. Managers need to learn to deal with situations in which resources, expertise and employees are not assigned or pre-set by formal authorities in an organization. These

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resources can be people "out there" who are attracted to providing suggestions on existing products or new ones. They feel attached to this task because of self-interest, a challenge matching their expertise or because they find an intrinsic reward in its achievement. The belief that these resources are free, but not for this reason less valid, represents a big internal cultural change that can be brought about by means of increasing involvement of the entire company. In fact, over time there was an increase in the entire firm's involvement and in the human and financial resources dedicated to the MIW project. Specifically, the process of idea selection greatly improved over time. Ideas are compared, grouped and discussed on the blog and this fact has become increasingly central to the firm. Soon after its start, the blog became "commentable", i.e. users were allowed to add comments to the firm's posts. Nevertheless, during the first year of activity (2009), the average number of comments per post was 12. In five years' time (2013), the average number of comments per post nearly quadruplicated (46). The tone of communication became more informal and peer-to-peer. Each idea under evaluation and subsequently realized or rejected is discussed by the MIW team in the idea's diary, i.e. a sub-set of the blog entirely dedicated to the evolution of each idea selected for evaluation. The team explains why they appreciated and selected the idea. If it is eventually realized, they discuss how it was carried out. Otherwise, they discuss the reasons for its rejection. Through the diary, the team frequently groups several ideas together and provide a solution that is intended to merge stimuli from several users. For example, White Mill launched a new kind of whole wheat croissant with cane sugar in May 2013. This was to satisfy the needs of 3 users who proposed similar most-voted ideas ("whole wheat croissant with honey"- 2009- "new flavors for croissant" – 2012- "croissant with pearl cane sugar" – 2013). As mentioned, communication improved over time by becoming richer and more continuous. This allowed for an increase in the alignment of the most-voted ideas and,

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consequently, in the number of ideas realized. This can be derived from the fact that, as the number of realized ideas increased steadily from 2009 to 2013 (going from 2 realized ideas in 2010 to 8 so far in 2013, the firm’s recourse to the direct selection procedure (the “search-examine-find” procedure) drastically reduced. In fact, in the first 2 years (2010-11) half of the realized ideas (3 out of 6) were directly selected by the company, while in 2012-13 only 1 idea out of fourteen realized was directly selected while the other thirteen were the most voted. The company’s approach has become smoother in recent times. Instead of directly selecting the best ideas for the company and thus by-passing the voting procedure, the marketing staff and its Manager have now become used to discussing the most-voted ideas that enter the evaluation procedure by means of the idea diary. During this discussion, which can go on for a long time, even years as in the following example, the original idea is progressively transformed into a proposal that matches the company’s needs. For example, the idea of a theme park intended as “a true mill that could become an amusement park with carousels made of giant White Mill products, bumper cars with giant cups, snack-shaped roller coaster” proposed in February 2009 entered into evaluation in August of the same year. This idea received lots of votes and was considered as really breakthrough by the company, as the DC manager reported above. Notwithstanding this, it is difficult to realize and the idea has now been under evaluation for nearly 5 years. It has lost its fantasy trait to become presently a more feasible project “combining playful and educational aspects”. As the Marketing Manager explains in the idea diary: “Even though we had found a partner with whom we could realize the theme park and had started to evaluate a concrete project, we decided not to carry it forward. In fact, we believe that all projects involving and engaging children should add educational goals to playful aspects in terms of promoting nutrition (against eating disorders and in favor of simple, high-quality ingredients) and healthier

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lifestyles (more exercise, outdoor activities, and so on)”. They have now launched a call to find the right place to host such an ambitious project. The perfect location should meet some basic requirements. It should be in a natural setting and ideally have a mill, even if a non-working one, next to a source of water; have a large outdoor area where several nature-related activities , as well as entertainment activities, could be held; and be easily reached and accessible to everyone. This call has been open since April 2011 and any good ideas are welcome!

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Semi-structured interviews (October 2010 – December 2011) 												
Primary data sources	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Informants</th> <th># Interviews (1st & 2nd round)</th> <th>Σ Hours</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>• Business Development and Innovation Manager</td> <td>3</td> <td>8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>• Digital Communication Manager</td> <td>3</td> <td>8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>• Marketing Manager</td> <td>2</td> <td>6</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Informants	# Interviews (1 st & 2 nd round)	Σ Hours	• Business Development and Innovation Manager	3	8	• Digital Communication Manager	3	8	• Marketing Manager	2	6
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• Business Development and Innovation Manager	3	8											
• Digital Communication Manager	3	8											
• Marketing Manager	2	6											
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal research notes On-going discussions Internal documents Balance sheets The company's Web site 												
Secondary data sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sector description Press releases Previous case studies conducted on the firm 												

Table 1. Evidence sources for the case study research

	PAST	PRESENT
PURPOSES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Create an organized community online – Create a platform of communication and relationship – Maintain and strengthen the community along time – Obtain feedback on WM initiatives from the community – Get new insights from the community – Get incrementally new ideas from the community 	The same plus getting radically new ideas from the community
PLACE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Web 2.0 Consumer portal – Facebook account – Bi-directional connection to the company Website – RSS feed of MIW Blog 	No change
PRINCIPLES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – MIW does not talk to customers, it listens – MIW does not teach, it learns – MIW is an operative platform – MIW aims at maintaining the interaction with customers genuine and sincere 	No change
PROCEDURES	Registration + searching/submitting/voting ideas The ideas most voted by the community enter the evaluation and feasibility processes	The same plus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Tutor to help customer submitting ideas – Quantitative/qualitative polls by brand managers – Sample stratification of the population that participate to the polls – Free products in reward for participation to the polls – "Search-examine-find" – Weekly review involving Brand Managers, BD&I and DC managers – Monthly newsletter to BD&I, MKT, MRU and Trade – Periodical reviews involving the whole company
PRACTITIONERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – WM customers – DCD employees 	The same plus : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Brand managers – BD&I

Legend:

BD&I: Business Development and Innovation manager; MKT: Marketing manager; MRU: Marketing Research Unit; DC: Digital Communication manager; WM: White Mill.

Table 2. From past to present

