

open ad, ad widget, inevitable death of something or other



September 28th

*You can tell a lot about a person from their choice of proverbs. Are you a "many hands make light work" person, or are you more "too many cooks spoil the broth"? That seems to be one of those fundamental divides in the way we approach our lives. The web is definitely a "many hands" place: one of its great strengths is its ability to aggregate and connect lots of like-minded people. As books from *The Wisdom of Crowds* to *Wikinomics* will point out, if you find the right question and provide the right framework for answering it, a bunch of enthusiastic "outsiders" will often do a better job than the so-called experts in that field. And, since advertising is full of so-called experts, we shouldn't be surprised to hear that our time has come.*

OpenAd.net is a Slovenian media business with global ambition. It's a marketplace for advertising, marketing and design ideas. It's been around for a while, but has recently started to get some serious attention. Creatives can exhibit their ideas in its galleries for free, while members (mostly marketing organisations) can peruse these galleries for a fee, or invite creatives to pitch for various projects. Looking through the case studies, you can instantly see the appeal: it's cheap, quick and energetic, you get all sorts of fresh and global perspectives and you can bypass traditional agency myopia and fiefdoms.

The most obvious downside to using OpenAd would seem to be that most of the creative ideas on offer aren't that great. But then you remember that the output of most global agencies isn't that great either and, if you're after slightly predictable, slightly generic creative work, you might as well get it quickly and cheaply. I can imagine OpenAd and its competitors disrupting the marketplace for ideas in the same way that the photo-libraries and Flickr are overturning the market for images.

But while OpenAd is just a different way of accessing talent, the Google Ad Widget hints at a deeper threat to the media status quo. It's a little bit of technology that allows you to put ads on your site as easily as you embed a YouTube video. This means that publishers (from bloggers to mainstream media owners) can decide to place the ads they want on their site.

It's not about media placement; it's about publisher choice. If the ad "works", they get paid; if not, they don't. But because publishers tend to know their audiences well and have a good sense of what sort of advertising they'll respond to, the ad placement is almost bound to be better than the typically scatter-shot banner ads buy. I'd always thought media people were the least likely to be swept away by media disruption, but maybe I'm wrong, maybe they're as vulnerable as the rest of us.