

COUNTRY SPOTLIGHTS

CANADIAN CONFIDENTIAL

One firm connects problem solvers with clients seeking solutions—without naming names **BY JANE MUNDY**



IMAGINE THAT YOUR BIOTECHNOLOGY business is facing a challenge that you don't know how to solve. Maybe you'd like to turn to open innovation by putting together a brainstorming team to bounce around ideas, but you also need to protect the confidentiality of the project. Then you're just the sort of client who calls on IdeaConnection in British Columbia.

When a customer brings a business challenge to IdeaConnection, the company searches its expert network to select a solution team, which a facilitator manages. Then, over a 12-week period, the team tackles that challenge. The client determines the parameters of a successful solution and even the fee that will

be paid for success—and only pays if the results from the solution team meet those criteria.

Best of all, everything remains confidential. IdeaConnection's solution team doesn't even know whom it is helping. "Because our hand-picked problem solvers are carefully screened beforehand and then form small teams of experts, we can give them much more information about our client's problem than companies using crowdsourcing," says Scott Wurtele, chief executive officer at IdeaConnection.

In the business of open innovation, confidentiality makes or breaks a company like IdeaConnection. In fact, any company in this line of work knows the fundamental need for secrecy. In France, for example, Daniel de Segovia Gross serves as the chief executive officer at Hypios, which also connects problem solvers with help-seeking companies, and he says, "Anonymity is crucial. Our clients never know the problem solvers unless they want to hire them."

Beyond confidentiality, intellectual property (IP) also raises questions in open-innovation environments. Even though members of the IdeaConnection team develop the solutions, the clients keep the IP. To make that possible, Wurtele explains, "We can screen out applicants who may not be able to transfer the IP. For instance, people working at certain universities may be restricted from IP transfer."

In many ways, IdeaConnection creates a triple-win situation—for the client, for IdeaConnection and for the members of the solution team. One team member, Harry Jacob, a biotechnologist from India, was awarded

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\$11,000 for his contribution to a solution. "This was the first time I have won such an award, and I checked it a couple of times to make sure it was real," says Jacob, laughing. "I initiated an idea that utilized the help from students in the scientific community to generate biologically important databases. Sorry I cannot go into more detail because I signed IdeaConnection's confidentiality clause." This open-innovation approach could change problem solving among scientists, technologists and business experts worldwide—just don't tell anyone.