

Abstract for the congress

Prosumer Revisited: Zur Aktualität der Prosumer-Debatte

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The Working Customer – the thesis and current trends

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Customers are active! Actually, this is not a new or inventive finding. Customers have always in multiple ways contributed to the services rendered by enterprises. They had to read up on the products and services offered, they had to frequent the point of sale, transport goods, maybe store them, prepare them for the consumption and dispose of the rests. Moreover the fact that services performed by the customers include work is a well-known finding of the research on housework. Nevertheless, already at the end of the 19th century, enterprises began with outsourcing work from employees to customers. Since several years the process of outsourcing continues at an accelerated tempo and it also develops a new quality. The thesis of Günter Voß and me is that relations between customers and enterprises are changing fundamentally. Enterprises are increasingly discovering and exploring the labour power of customers. And the contribution of customers goes way beyond the classical co-production. Customers not only contribute to services that they use themselves. They also work for the benefit of other customers. Basically this means that a new type of consumer could emerge, the *working customer*. This working customer could displace the classical type of the passive “buyer-customer”.

The working customer is characterised by the fact that his or her labour force is increasingly used and controlled by the enterprises. He or she is not only sporadically active as a co-producer. Instead, he or she is systematically utilized as an unpaid employee. Technological innovation, especially the Internet, is an important driving force in the process of outsourcing to the customer. Initially, the Web 2.0 was characterized by the anti-commercial impetus of the “open source” movement. By now, it is used by many enterprises as a means for the cooperation with customers. Crowdsourcing, Open Innovation, „Interaktive Wertschöpfung“ and Social Commerce are buzzwords that describe how enterprises are trying to integrate customer or users in their processes. For instance, customers are assigned for the development and de-

sign of new products, they watch trends, they evaluate products and services or advise other customers.

In this contribution, the thesis of the working customer is presented more in detail. Up-to-date examples for the outsourcing to the customer through the Web 2.0 are presented and discussed with reference to the thesis of the working customer. To which extent are we already working customers and which future developments may be expected?