



## GroveTalk — Winter 2005



Hello and welcome back to another OAK update.

This past year has been one of remarkable growth here at OAK. I have provided my services to an interesting variety of clients, participated in the scripting of a corporate demo for Sparks Productions, and created a considerable body of work in historical and biographical journalism.

Drawing on the momentum of my monthly *Gleaner* column, *Through Grace's Eyes*, I have taken on many freelance assignments for the *Gleaner* newspapers. I have written pieces on Hurricane Hazel, Canadian athlete and sports journalist Bobby Rosenfeld, Remembrance Day, the former Stelco Swansea Works site, and Michael Hollingsworth's historical and satirical play *The Red River Rebellion* (article out soon).

I continue to take on challenging and interesting assignments for the *Gleaner*, and will seek out new ways to grow and strengthen the OAK brand.

You will find my articles and commercial writing projects in the **newly updated Samples section** of my site. When you visit <http://oakwriter.com/Samples.shtml> you will notice that I have restructured and streamlined my Samples page to make it easier for you to access my writing!

In order to learn about my new community and extend my services further, I have joined the **Etobicoke Chamber of Commerce**. By working with this positive and encouraging group I hope to heighten OAK's profile and reach new clients in need of writing services.

As always, I am seeking out creative allies, to enhance my offering. Look for more news on this in the Spring 2005 issue.

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Read on...

## **Book Review: The Wisdom of Crowds by James Surowiecki**

Every so often a book seizes the obvious in a unique way, turns current prevailing wisdom on its head, and gets people thinking and talking.

Here is such a book. James Surowiecki's *The Wisdom of Crowds* is a brilliant, engaging, and persuasive exploration of a deceptively simple but powerful premise: large groups are smarter than the elite few.

Using clear and accessible language, Surowiecki cites everyday examples and fascinating case studies to show us how crowds can solve problems, answer questions, and predict the future better than the most brilliant of experts.

He does not say there is no need for specialists, as it is simply impossible for each of us to know everything about our complex world. Most of us have neither the time nor the inclination to gather significant amounts of information outside the purview of our chosen professions.

(I would not be writing this review if I thought that individuals were without unique and valuable skills.)

What Surowiecki says is that groupthink, arrogance, and poorly designed organizations can lead not only to limited information and complacency but also to dangerous strategies in business, politics, and many other facets of life.

He cautions, however, that a group will not necessarily provide good answers. Coercion, group bias, and cognitive homogeneity can result in attitudes and ideas that are narrow and misleading.

Conversely, it is when a group is large, decentralized, and composed of independent individuals that its solutions will be wise and effective. Collective wisdom is at its greatest when the crowd is diverse in its knowledge, opinions, and perspectives.

But in order to benefit from collective wisdom we must have a means of aggregating it and harnessing it.

One salient and ubiquitous example of where we have succeeded in doing this is something many of us use every day—Google.

Surowiecki has an astounding knack for pointing out telling examples of crowd phenomena that exist in our daily lives. Throughout the book he explains such things as stock market bubbles and crashes, polls, meeting customer needs, highway gridlock, pedestrian traffic, entertaining behavioural experiments, and even mafia organizational structure. He gives the reader plenty of fun and interesting questions to ponder.

The range of thought inherent in *The Wisdom of Crowds* makes the ideas and lessons it contains applicable to any person or group interested in gathering information and using it to make wise decisions.

This book is an enjoyable read for those who seek to understand patterns in business and in life.

Surowiecki, a business columnist for *The New Yorker*, believes in the free market and democracy, and he makes a case for both with bracing lucidity. It is his regard for fair play and healthy competition that impels him to critique and defend a system he knows is capable of being better.

After all, improving performance is at the heart of business.

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My business is finding great words and ideas for those who have placed their trust in OAK. Whether I am writing about people or the products, services, and events that enhance people's lives, my mission is to **engage, persuade, inspire, and connect**.

Accordingly, my business is also to extend a welcome those who have yet to consider OAK for their communications needs.

I would like to thank my clients and those who have shown interest in OAK.

All the very best for 2005 and please look for the Spring 2005 GroveTalk.

Regards,

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