

COMMUNITY OF IDEAS

A rogue media network connects Spanish innovators. By Kathryn Tuggle

BACK WHEN ALFONS CORNELLA was a university physics student, he composed the first mathematical text on relativity ever published in his native Catalan tongue. The book didn't go far—but it did inspire a lifelong quest that, decades later, would yield a company called Infonomia.

"After I wrote the book, I understood that my mission would be to acquire ideas and diffuse them to society by any means," Cornellà says. That's what his 10-year-old company does—tapping a network of more than 12,000 Spanish businesspeople and thinkers for ideas that fuel a Web site, magazine, conferences, and books.

Infonomia began with Cornellà's contact file: For three years, he did nothing but promote the notion of an innovation network among friends, colleagues, and, well, anyone who'd listen. By 2000, he was up to 5,000 members—enough to start a conference that brought together designers, techies, and execs of all stripes.

Those conferences now attract 10,000 attendees a year. Cornellà's Community of Innovators, mostly in Spain but increasingly in Latin America, also gather at Infonomia.com to share tips on how to implement their breakthrough ideas, such as a backpack that helps parents monitor their kids' exercise. His magazine, *if...*, distributed via the seatbacks of Vueling, a Spanish discount airline, is packed with interviews with well-known CEOs and designers.

"Infonomia is an editor of ideas," Cornellà says. "More exactly, we define ourselves as an 'edge space,' where people from smart businesses can get the ideas they should be aware of." Innovation, he believes, happens when ideas connect across unfamiliar disciplines.

It works for Antonio Flores, president of Node Co., a consultancy and advertising agency in Barcelona. "It's impossible to stay ahead of the competition unless you know what it's doing," Flores says. "[Infonomia] shows you what the competition does and gives you ideas for how to do it better."

▶ DATA DUMP

Spain ranked **16th** in innovation out of the 25 European Union member countries in 2005. Sweden topped the list.
Source: European Commission

Graphic by Raymond Biesinger

A CONCISE HISTORY OF THE INFONOMIA PHENOMENON

