

Whitepaper:

**20 Years of Best Practices in  
Harnessing Corporate Open  
Innovation Portals for Impact**

*yet* 

---

# 20 Years of Best Practices in Harnessing Corporate Open Innovation Portals for Impact

---

**Corporate open innovation portals have been around for, well, 20 years. But they are not yet ubiquitous, and many companies are just starting to explore if they want to include an open innovation portal among their innovation or collaborative efforts. Others have open innovation portals that are past their prime, not as efficient or effective, or don't take advantage of the latest tools to engage different types of diverse audiences.**

**This whitepaper helps organizations understand different approaches to corporate open innovation portals and the importance of IP anti-contamination and efficient filtering in choosing the best innovation portals for their unique situations. It can serve as a good starting point for a new initiative, or a primer for taking a new look or approach to an existing portal.**

*“Young inventor invents technical tool for big company”* – that’s a news story to which we all respond. The underdog saves the big company with a great idea. That was the story reported in a business article in the *New York Times* (February 22, 2014), a tale of Mark King, a young 21-year-old community-college dropout, who responded to a call for ideas on a website sponsored by General Mills. King responded to a technology problem posted on the company’s website and invented an organoleptic analyzer -- a way to measure the texture of granola bars. King’s side of the story is good reading (story link [here](#)), but we’re interested in the *corporate* side of that story – why and how companies like General Mills decided to utilize an idea submission program.

Numerous companies – Unilever, General Mills, GSK, Sanofi, Mondeléz International, Colgate-Palmolive, Altria, Philip Morris International, to name just a few -- have made structured solution or innovation submission programs a functional part of their open innovation practice. Other B2B and B2C firms are now paying attention, trying to decide whether to move in this direction, too.

# Colgate-Palmolive Open Innovation Portal

COLGATE-PALMOLIVE

Open Innovation Home Page | My Submissions | Help/FAQ

Managed by **yet2**

## Welcome to the Open Innovation Submission Portal

[Start Here](#)

**New Challenge: Dissolvable Packaging**

Colgate-Palmolive is seeking sustainable packaging solutions that can be applied to bar soaps that will dissolve in cold water.

**If you have a great new innovation, click here to let us know!**

At Colgate-Palmolive we believe strongly in collaborative innovation.

The Colgate-Palmolive open innovation submission portal is where you can submit your ideas and innovations to our strategic challenges. yet2 manages the portal and will serve as a consistent point of contact for you during the submission process. All the information you provide in these initial stages should be publicly available and imposes no obligation of confidentiality for Colgate or any of its brands. If your unique idea or innovation passes our

### What is Colgate-Palmolive looking for?

[See full needs list here >>](#)

Colgate-Palmolive is actively looking for innovation and partnership solutions in the Oral, Personal, Home and Pet Care categories.

Colgate-Palmolive is particularly interested in exploring potential partnerships that would enable it to expand its capabilities in the following platform areas:

In response, an armada of service providers has emerged to help companies design and put such an innovation portal plan into action. Because these programs are still relatively new, it can be challenging to know where to start.

## Collaborative vs. Direct Innovation Portals

Corporations are currently using several different implementation models to accomplish their innovation submission goals. Most structured programs, like that of Unilever, for example, take the form of a dedicated micro-site linked off of the corporate website – called “innovation portals.” Some companies limit their portals simply to encouraging and collecting ideas as they come in. Other companies additionally list their current technology needs, in order to encourage responses to those specific technical challenges. Both Unilever and General Mills, for example, include their own technical challenges. It was to one of the posted challenges in General Mills’ G-Win program that Mark King responded.

Some of the flavor variations on innovation submission programs include crowdsourcing and co-creation models, terms we will expand upon later.

yet2 divides the innovation submission market into two: Collaborative vs. Direct innovation portals. The various models in current vogue sort themselves into these two large buckets. Deciding whether a direct or collaborative portal implementation is best depends upon cultural fit as well as the intellectual property goals of any specific company.

Collaborative innovation portals are sites in which submitters' ideas can be seen by everyone – for comments, idea-building, and generating buzz. Collaborative portals can be an excellent tool for engaging and creating a conversation with customers, innovators, and the corporate supply chain. They may also be used to help a company tap into customer trends – for example, asking customers (the “crowd”) which colors or flavors are most popular, and/or to gather or test different ideas for existing products (crowd-sourcing). In another variation, collaborative sites may be deliberately designed to enable participants to build on one another's ideas in the spirit of a virtual team (co-creation). Host companies to crowd-sourcing and co-creation models sometimes offer rewards or prizes for the best solution ideas to specific problems.

The most successful open portal webpages are extremely customer oriented, designed as consciously and thoroughly as any consumer-facing storefront or webpage. Such designs incorporate creative user interface design, gamification of content, and other engagement tools.

## Leveraging an Open Innovation Portal to Build an Innovation Ecosystem

An open innovation portal can be much more than just a website to collect ideas and protect the corporation against IP-contamination. Portals can play a key role in strategic initiatives and serve as a vital component in building an innovation ecosystem.

That is exactly what Mondeléz International is doing with their open innovation portals – yes – portals. Mondeléz has an established corporate open innovation portal for innovations of many types. Mondeléz International also recently launched SnackFutures to invent new brands and businesses and capitalize on changing consumer trends. It is not OI as “business-as-usual.” It is OI as a key strategic initiative.

Join yet2 for a webinar featuring Paula Angeli, Open Innovation and Knowledge Management, Mondeléz International, Mel Gaceta, Director, Ventures at Mondeléz International, and Brigitte Wolf, Global Head of SnackFutures Innovation at Mondeléz International.

**Watch the recorded webinar: <http://bit.ly/33kkvfN>**

Direct innovation portals, on the other hand, are ones in which technical solutions or ideas are submitted directly -- nobody sees a given submission except the company itself (and/or their service agent if they have outsourced their portal management). This is the way Mark King submitted his idea to General Mills. Many other firms choose direct portals, as well, including Unilever, Philip Morris International and GSK. Companies with direct innovation portals tend to be seeking technology, technology platforms, and business process solutions. As a result, companies deploying direct portals may gently discourage brand “ideas” in favor of developed “*solutions*” – insights or inventions already prototyped, tested, and ideally, protected by initial intellectual property filings. This difference in outcome goals, between “ideas” and “solutions” is a key distinction.

Submitters of further developed solutions may hesitate to participate in a collaborative innovation portal, because such solution-owners would like to realize a return on the investment they’ve made in developing their ideas. Moreover, not only do solution-submitters want to realize a return, they want to *maximize* the economic value of their developments, and may not care to be limited by a predetermined “reward,” as often set in open portal models. Direct portal models help protect both the submitter’s and the receiver’s intellectual property – since both parties can know with whom they are dealing. Direct portals permit two-way, personal communication between idea submitters and the companies. Thus, the host company might share deeper contextual information or ask specific questions of submitters.

Like collaborative portals, direct innovation portals are also designed to be user-friendly and to encourage submissions, but they are generally less consumer-oriented and tend not to utilize games and contests.

One emergent variation on direct portals is “internal portals” – ones designed to be used entirely within the company, for employees. Internal systems, by definition, do not have confidentiality issues, since the entire system operates underneath the confidentiality umbrella of the firm. As such, some internal implementations use crowd-sourcing, game, and reward features to help develop ideas, build cohesion and collegiality, and to serve broader employee morale goals.

## Managed Internally or Outsourced to Agent

Internally managing a corporate innovation submission portal requires a combination of marketing and technology skills. It can require many of the same job responsibilities and daily attentions as managing other web and social media but, most importantly, an understanding and integration into the innovation process of the company.

First, the back-end submission management function must either be designed and coded, or outsourced. On the front-end, some team or individuals must be responsible for developing and writing the need content, developing the selection criteria, posting the challenge information, responding to idea submitters, and vetting and filtering potential solutions. Additionally, potential solutions must ultimately be channeled into the correct internal teams to enter the company's R&D process. This information must also be updated to reflect changing business needs.

As for any website, portals are not a "build it and they will come" proposition. A portal site must be marketed with the same levels of attention and budget as for other corporate activities, and those responsible for content management must maintain attention to keep the content and conversations fresh, productive, engaging, and appropriate. Overall, developing a homegrown system requires development time and staff, plus a dedicated set of resources for ongoing administration, system management, and marketing.

### Proven Best Practices

With 20 years of observing open innovation portals, we've honed best practices across a wide range of industries and all geographies. These are not just for making the portal work efficiently and effectively, but also for creating portals with underlying processes that maximize results and align with strategic initiatives.

- Provide an IP anti-contamination single point of entry for all external ideas
- Prevent internal innovation fatigue
- Facilitate the most promising submissions
- Tap multiple, diverse, global innovation communities
- Share challenges seamlessly

Outsourcing portal management to a service provider means using an outside service for any portion of the portal preparation and/or implementation. These functions can include website design and execution; integration of the knowledge management backbone; coordination of portal content and technology need postings; vetting of ideas via conversations with submitters; and filtering/prioritizing submissions to appropriate internal technical staff. A number of service providers offer pieces or full turnkey packages that address these needs.

When selecting a service provider, be sure to select an agent experienced with the fundamental activities of open innovation – the need articulation, technology scouting, vetting, and filtering – that are at the heart of your open innovation goals. That is where the core competency, and value, of an innovation submission portal resides.

A key advantage to using an outside service provider, aside from the obvious of reducing the overburdening of internal teams, is avoiding IP-contamination. A skilled outside service can catch every single submission that inadvertently contains confidential information. Such information, if unchecked, could expose your company to fractious IP ownership disputes later. For companies who post their own technology needs, an experienced agent will help your staff clarify and articulate those specific needs – for more on-target responses and better efficiency. A good agent will review submissions, filter out the rubbish, and work with submitters to extract the relevant information before passing them along to your internal team for further evaluation. When skillfully done, this process is advantageous to the submitters too – it can give them the opportunity to provide deeper substantiation and answer questions not addressed by the portal submission form. It can also make sure they haven't given away too much information (especially in cases in which a submitter's ideas are not yet patent-protected).

Though an outside portal management agent can provide as turnkey a system as your company might like, please note that marketing of the portal by company itself is critical. An outside agent can help with an initial campaign to launch the site and provide marketing via their own networks. But we see a greatly enhanced volume of submissions when the corporate site owner employs all their usual corporate marketing tools and harnesses the full power of their own brand name, consistently, over time.

## Determining the Best Choices for Your Company

Collaborative or direct, internally supported or outsourced?

As so often happens, there are no universal right answers, only the best answers for your specific situation. The optimal portal system balances three key considerations.

1. Number of ideas submitted: the more ideas received, the more ideas there are to filter through, and the greater the nominal “noise” in the whole system.
2. Sensitivity to intellectual property protection: the more intellectual property protection is a concern, the less social the experience becomes, and the more a company is likely to reduce the raw number of ideas received while increasing overall solution value.
2. Amount of filtering work required: the more ideas, the more work required to filter through them. The trade-off here is volume vs. quality. Counter-intuitively, a lower number of higher quality solutions does not necessarily save filtering time, but does change the type of work done. The nature of the filtering work for technical solutions is usually more in-depth, calling for more direct conversations with submitters, more research into patent coverage, etc.

## 6 Practical Insights for Successful Portal Implementations

- 85% of submissions are low priority; 15% can be potentially interesting; and <10% incredibly valuable.
- If you want a consistent flow of submissions, you will need to commit to high profile placement on your corporate site and/or sustained marketing of this innovation function.
- It’s easy to scare off submitters – legalese alone can be very intimidating. And every extra click you impose on submitters roughly halves the number of submissions you can expect.
- Your internal IT has great incentive to win your business, and limited incentive to get you all the way to the revised portal that works smoothly for administrators and submitters alike.
- Imposing even a little pain on internal vetters (often in the form of balky administrative function User Interfaces (UI) usually results in quick abandonment of the task by employees.
- Whether you insource or outsource each of these individual capabilities, you want a *team*, not a lead *person*, well-versed in the skills of IP-contamination protection, tech-transfer deal experience, and customer service.

In choosing the best portal design, a company wishing to increase its conversations, touchpoints and engagement with customers requires a collaborative platform, with appropriate social media tools. This is where you must think about your audience and the social media platforms on which they most likely engage. While many companies will automatically think of LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter, there are others to consider. YouTube is the second largest search engine; how much of a visual component is there to your audience/tech needs? Do you think your community of solvers might be most male gamers? Then you should consider Reddit. If you are looking to reach communities of females, moms, and DIYers, then Pinterest is a platform that needs to be included in your social media tools.

Another company, seeking closer-to-market technical solutions and disruptive opportunities, may be better served by the higher percentage of IP-protected solutions, the anti-contamination, and the sophisticated filtering capabilities of direct platforms.

Perhaps surprisingly, the best portal system choices do not split naturally by a B2B or B2C grouping or other company segmentation. B2B companies might have strong desire to increase conversations with customers, and consumer companies might seek to solve challenging technology needs.

All of these counterbalancing considerations require thoughtful sifting. Before launching into questions of crowdsourcing, co-creation, knowledge management software, reward systems, web tools, etc., it is worthwhile to step back and look at fundamental motives. Here is a series of questions to pose internally as your company considers the best solution set:

#### Collaborative vs. Direct

- Are we looking for technical solutions to technology challenges?
- Are we looking for new product ideas to enhance/extend our existing products' lifecycles
  - e.g. new flavors, colors?
  - Are we looking to expand our supplier network, and how concerned are we about potential IP contamination in those discussions?
- Do we want to share confidential or non-confidential levels of detail?
  - Do we want to offer rewards or do we want to retain flexibility to offer larger paybacks for more developed solutions?
- How important is corporate ownership of a solution's IP?

# Sample Corporate Open Innovation Portals



**Mondelez**  
MAKING LIFE BETTER

HOME INVENT REINVENT VENTURE HELP/FAQ MY SUBMISSIONS

## SNACKFUTURES

INVENT. REINVENT. VENTURE

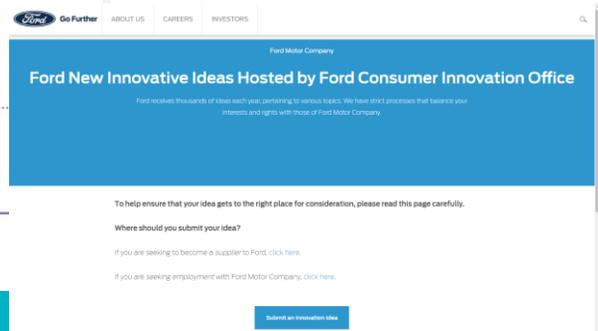
Discovering and unleashing innovative ideas to lead the future of snacking



**Come partner with us**

**Tell us more about yourself and your idea**

powered by **yet2**



**Ford** Go Further ABOUT US CAREERS INVESTORS

Ford Motor Company

## Ford New Innovative Ideas Hosted by Ford Consumer Innovation Office

Ford receives thousands of ideas each year, pertaining to various topics. We have strict processes that balance your interests and rights with those of Ford Motor Company.

To help ensure that your idea gets to the right place for consideration, please read this page carefully.

**Where should you submit your idea?**

If you are seeking to become a supplier to Ford, click here.

If you are seeking employment with Ford Motor Company, click here.

[Submit all required files](#)



**Altria**

## Welcome to the Altria Open Innovation Portal

**SUBMIT YOUR IDEA**

Altria is home to operating companies which have been undisputed market leaders in the U.S. tobacco industry for decades. We are focused on developing and marketing a portfolio of superior reduced risk products that adult smokers may choose over cigarettes. The focus of our industry is adult innovation, harm reduction and improved consumer choice. At the Altria Center for Research and Technology in Richmond, VA, our world class team of scientists and engineers are leading the development of the next generation of reduced risk products.

Innovation and collaboration drive us. We know that the world is full of brilliant people with bright and useful ideas and we welcome the opportunity to engage with others regarding possible technical solutions, including through licenses or inventions that can assist in our expanding or enhancing our product portfolio.

If you have an idea related to new products, new technologies or new advancements relating to our business, we want to hear from you! Please make your submission or contact us internally without sharing any confidential information. After an initial review by PMO, your submission may ultimately be reviewed by the Altria brand. If Altria takes an interest in your submission, you will be contacted and both brand and legal will enter into a Confidentiality Agreement.

[Submit all required files](#)



**PHILIP MORRIS INTERNATIONAL** HOME ABOUT US MY SUBMISSIONS FAQ

## WELCOME TO THE PHILIP MORRIS INTERNATIONAL INC. PMU IDEA SUBMISSION PORTAL

PMI is leading a transformation in the tobacco industry, and we are pioneering the development, scientific assessment and commercialization of a series of smoke-free products including heat-not-burn, e-cigs, and other nicotine-containing products. We have state-of-the-art research facilities in Heidelberg, Ireland, Singapore and Hong Kong. If our scientists, engineers, and others are looking for the design and support of these innovative products, we are passionate about innovation, and eager to engage with others regarding possible technical solutions, including through license or acquisition that could potentially help us create new smoke-free products or enhance our existing product range.

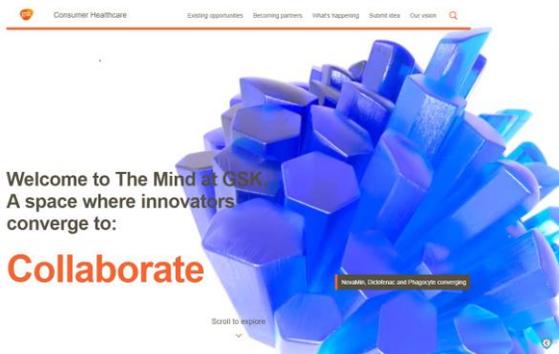
If you have an idea related to new products or new technologies linked with our business that you would like to share, please make your submission as detailed as necessary without sharing any confidential information. After an initial review by our contractor yet2, your submission will ultimately be reviewed by

**CONTINUE TO IDEA SUBMISSION FORM**

Fill out all required fields and submit your innovation in just a few easy steps.

Ready?

**LET'S GO!**



Consumer Healthcare Existing opportunities Becoming partners What's happening Submit idea Our vision

## Welcome to The Mind at GSK

A space where innovators converge to:

# Collaborate

Scroll to explore

Neurology, Diabetes and Phagocyte converging

## Internally Developed or Outsourced

- How important is it not to be contaminated internally with potential new solution ideas?
- Do we prefer platform-enabling solution providers to co-create? Or do we prefer for solution providers to submit dedicated solutions to fit our custom needs?
- Do we have the staff to devote to supporting a portal system?
- Would we like our portal to be part of our full open innovation process?

## Client Portal Choices and Features to Consider

Many of yet2's clients have selected the outsourced, direct platform route. Consumer products giant Unilever is one example. "Providing a single route of entry for technology solutions and protecting against intellectual property contamination was one of our biggest concerns," reports Jonathan Hague, VP, Open Innovation at Unilever. "So getting a partner between us and solution submitters was really important. So far the program is working well. We feel we have lowered the risk of inadvertent IP contamination and we are happy the process of vetting and filtering has been removed – we have received over 3000 submissions to date. yet2 manages the filtering in a timely and efficient way, so we receive only the most viable solutions, enabling our R&D resource to focus on the ones that are the best fit to us."

Whether developed internally or externally, helpful portal features include:

- Needs writing – including an internal process for corporate technology needs identification, write-up, and hosting on portal
- Integrated external solution submissions management back end: access to relevant technology solutions via client admin access
- A well-designed submission form to enabled a clear understanding of submitter's solution, applications, and IP status
- Personalized or standardized FAQs, Terms & Conditions, legal waiver, process flow and communications with submitters

A well-designed back end for administration is the most critical feature to enable all information and correspondence to be tracked back to each individual submission for historical review. An experienced vendor, familiar with usage needs throughout your product development systems, will help you optimize system flexibility.

## Closing Thoughts

Technology over the past 10 – 15 years has enabled many different – and previously unimaginable – ways to interact with customers, suppliers, inventors, and problem solvers. For companies looking to create collaborative ecosystems, it's no longer about simply pushing marketing messages at customers and potential customers. There's now an unprecedented opportunity to embrace – in the correct way – ideas from many sectors, many regions, and many types of people to help solve thorny technical challenges and to help address strategic corporate initiatives. Corporate innovation portals are one way to encourage this conversation in an organized way. Choosing the best portal design and system requires asking some cultural and mission-oriented questions, the answers to which will lead a company in the right direction. Key considerations include submitter motivations and cultural fit for Collaborative vs. Direct; interest level in outsourced filtering to avoid IP-contamination; the importance of back-end administration; and the impact of UI design on usability for both submitters and for internal OI personnel.

Beyond that, those pioneers in open innovation portals have quantifiable ROI – and significant ROI at that. How –and what – they measure as ROI differs on their primary objectives for their open innovation portals. We have seen – and are continuing to see companies realize a return on investment in terms of IP anti-contamination and in identifying and pursuing needle-moving ideas submitted through open innovation portals.

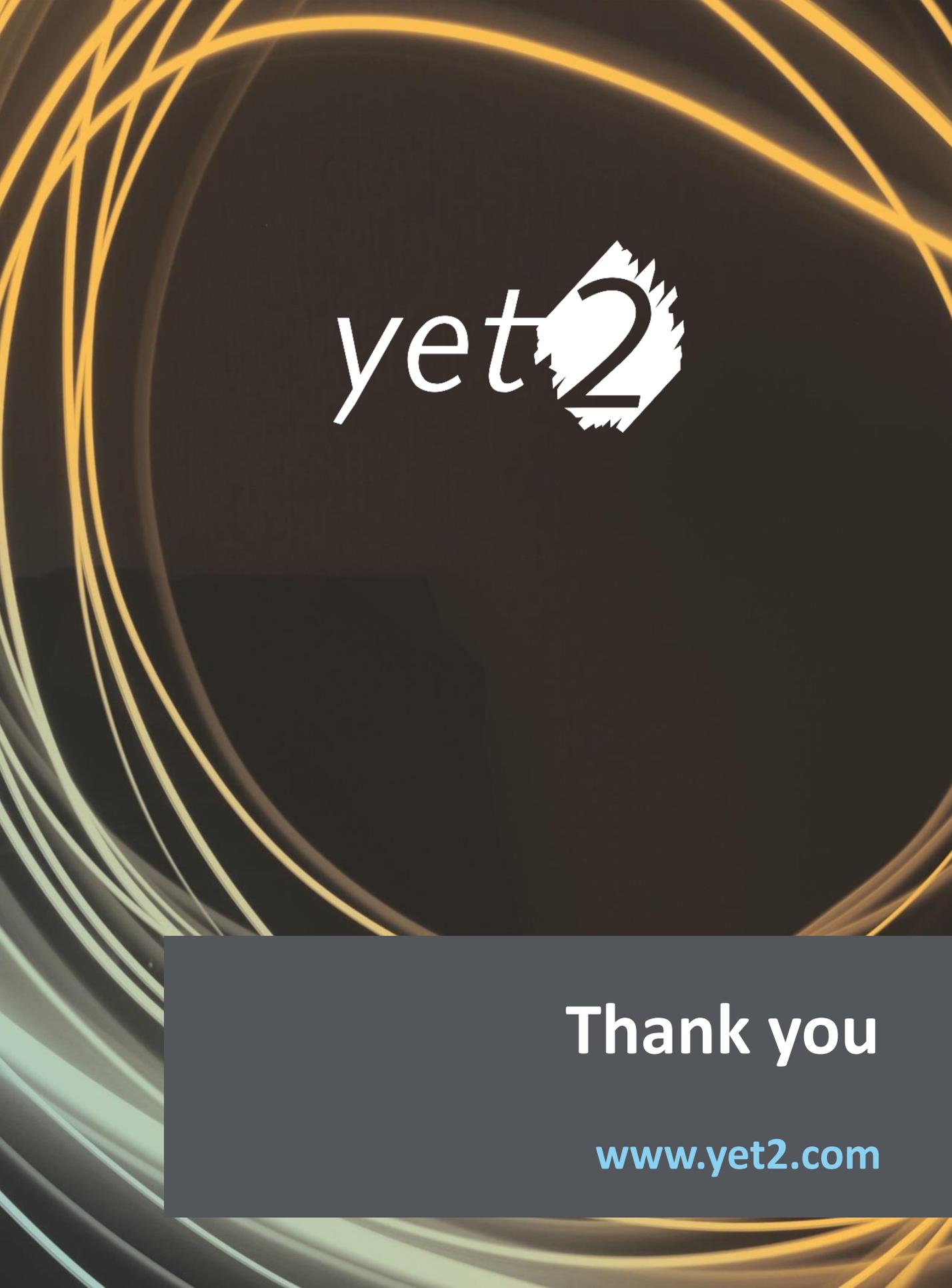
## Next Steps

For more information about yet2's Open Innovation Portal Services, visit: <http://bit.ly/2MPxP6W>

## About yet2

yet2 is a global consulting firm that works with Fortune 500 companies to harness open innovation to drive business strategy and growth. Our team members are commercially, technically, and intellectual property-astute consultants with 20 years' experience across technology scouting, intellectual property (IP), business development and ventures. We offer a range of open innovation services, including technology scouting, innovation tours, out-licensing, open innovation portals, and patent transactions.

For more information, visit: [www.yet2.com](http://www.yet2.com)



yet2

Thank you

[www.yet2.com](http://www.yet2.com)