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Focus on Innovation

Focus on Innovation is a monthly electronic newsletter designed to provoke thoughts and ideas on how to bring innovation to life within the organizations in which we work.

For Those on the Run

Stuck for novel and useful ideas? Read this month's newsletter to find out more about unique strategies to hunt for ideas.

Idea Hunting

"All new ideas are combinations of existing ideas. And the further apart the ideas, the more innovative the combination. "

- Frans Johansson, The Medici Effect

Ideas are everywhere. The question for some of us is where to find them. The fact is people have brilliant thoughts all the time, including you. Winning the idea game is about keeping your eyes and ears open to them, and perhaps trying some new strategies to hunt them down. Here are five strategies you might want to consider.

Idea Hunting Strategies

- **Idea Farming:** The concept of an idea farm involves getting people together, planting some seeds, watering it a little, seeing if something grows. Interestingly, the concept of idea farming is often used by inventors in the farming industry. For example, the almond industry was literally turned around with the repositioning of almonds as a healthy food. It was a seed of an idea, cultivated through scientific research and harvested with a five year marketing campaign.

Companies like Hasbro, IBM, Cisco, etc. maintain several idea channels to farm ideas - employees, consumers, partners, even inventors. IBM, for example, has created *ThinkPlace*, an online forum for collecting ideas from any of its 350,000 employees - and nearly 10 percent of them are active users. Companies, such as 3M, have found that combining the multiple perspectives of IT and R&D lead to the most promising insights. Hasbro has created something similar to a blog for testing beta versions of online games, etc.

Idea farming at General Electric (GE) equates to:

- Requires good seed = Ideas with good lineage
- Needs good soil = Organizational support
- Has plenty of water = Adequate funding
- Uses good fertilizer = Sense of market need
- Needs right climate = The right champion

(Source: J. F. Vercellotti at GE Lighting in Cleveland)

- **Idea/Design 'Charette':** A 'charrette' is an intensely focused work session to generate input from multiple stakeholders. What distinguishes a 'charrette' from brainstorming is that in a charrette, ideas are expressed visually through sketches, diagrams, and maps as well as through words. Derived from the French word for wagon, it comes from the practice of architecture students in the early 1800s, who used carts to rush their drawings from one place to another to get final approvals. In much the same way, when you use the 'Charette' Procedure, you take the ideas generated by a group, and cart them over to the next group, for them to be built upon, refined, and finally prioritized. For different approaches for conducting an idea/design 'charrette' procedure check out:

- The 'Charette Procedure': Brainstorming Multiple Ideas With Multiple Stakeholders - http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newCT_90.htm
- The 'Charrette': a Uniquely Effective Way of Designing a Proposed Project's Viability - <http://hanksconsulting.com/Charrette.html>.
- Facilitation Techniques for the Community Visioning Process - <http://commpres.env.state.ma.us/publications/!BuildingVibrantCommunitiesPDFVersion/BVCO8-app%20aa.pdf>

- **Trigger Sessions:** Trigger Sessions are a good way of getting lots of ideas down from untrained resources. Here's how it works:
 - The Problem owner defines the problem
 - Each member of group writes down his ideas in shorthand (2 minutes only)
 - One member reads out his list - others silently cross out ideas read out and write down "Hitch-hiked" ideas
 - The second member reads out his list of ideas not already covered, followed in turn by other members
 - The last member reads out his original list and his "Hitch-hiked" list and procedure is repeated counter current (i.e. if there are 6 folk, the order goes 1,2,3,4,5,6,5,4,3,2,1,2,3,4,5,6...)

A good group will be able to manage seven passes. Everyone's paper is then collected and can be typed up into a single list of ideas - all duplicates should have been crossed out during the session.

- **A picture is worth a 1000 ideas:** Photos, clip art, line art, fine art, and objects are all great sources for ideas. The reason images make great idea starters is that they access the right brain- the place where words don't usually hang out. Images get you thinking in a new way about things- connecting thoughts that don't usually get connected, triggering memories. Images involve your eyes in the process of bringing in information. You don't have the problems of words tripping over each other or of your left brain trying to edit your thoughts when all you want to do is get to an idea. Good writers, for example, collect images and use them, to fuel ideas.
- **Net Scouting:** The Internet is an open and generous idea resource, which can greatly contribute to the success of a project when the search is focused. Net scouting involves searching the Internet for ideas related to a project. Start with your initial idea(s) and start googling - you will

be amazed at what you might find. Try using a standard, unique designation for indicating ideas so that they stand out clearly within any text and are unique so they can be found by a computer search. Suggestions: !!this is an idea!! or !?questionable idea?!

What's the Bottom line

Like a good hunter, you need to search high and low, remain patient, and have a way to capture good ideas once you have spotted them.



Please feel free to pass this newsletter on to others.

If you would like more information about the ideas and topics listed in this issue, contact Judy Laws, Ph.D. at jlaws@foursightconsulting.com.

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