

CREATIVE COMPOST



Where Great Marketing Ideas Grow

Vol. IV, No. 7

Brainstorm Your Way to Greatness

Was your last brainstorming session a colossal failure? Or have you resisted attempts to even give it a try out of primal fear? Here's a painless, proven way to trigger imaginative solutions.

1) Focus, focus, focus. No brainstorming effort can succeed without a goal. And no, "increase our profits" is not a goal. Write a very narrow one-sentence statement that outlines what you want to accomplish. Be specific. Later, you'll plaster this statement all over your brainstorming room so the participants can't escape it. Some quick examples: What non-competing companies/industries are trying to reach the same customers we are? How can we get college students to try our product? What core ideals should be coming through in our marketing to separate us from the competition?

2) Select your team. This isn't fourth grade dodgeball, so don't pick your pals or even colleagues who think alike...or like you. The whole idea is to mix it up — people who are intimately familiar with your situation or objective, a few who have a bit of working knowledge, and the rest who don't have clue one about what you're doing. Think about people you might not often interact with who could

have a completely different take on the situation — customer service reps, bean counters, maybe your copywriter or graphic designer. Pick people who seem smart, imaginative, maybe even a little subversive. You'll also need a team leader to write the focus statement, get everything organized, and lead the session itself. If you're still reading this, that's probably *you*. Leave out the company bigwigs who might limit free expression or dominate the session's direction.

Send an invite to participants that includes the session's focus statement, a creative brief if applicable, and any additional information they might find useful as background.

3) Set the scene. Pick a location that's conducive to creative expression. If out of the office isn't feasible, then definitely a spot where you can meet uninterrupted. Set aside a reasonable amount of time — two hours is usually the minimum you

can expect to accomplish anything. Gather some tools for inspiration and expression: markers, easel or poster pads, and tape or tacks to post ideas. Toys are critical for

(cont'd on p. 3)

Marketing Mishaps

Welcome to *Creative Compost's* newest column! Each issue, we'll look at some entertaining yet eye-opening examples of bad marketing in the noble quest to improve our own efforts.

Mixed messages

The new marketing campaign for a large law firm has a major disconnect between the message it thinks it's sending and the

(cont'd on p. 2)

In this issue...

Page 2

Trend Watch:
Dying to be Different

Page 3

CPR for Your Business

Page 4

Life Lessons



Baby boomers are once again breaking new ground and putting their unique stamp on the traditional — this time, with their funerals. Undertakers nationwide are reporting a boom in “themed” funerals that celebrate the deceased’s passion — from hunting to cooking. According to the National Funeral Directors Association, more than half of American funerals now have themes. Providers are quickly jumping on this lucrative trend, many building permanent sets for common themes. Mourners in “Big Mama’s Kitchen,” for example, can share the deceased’s favorite recipes cooked right on the spot. One funeral home is expanding into the sports arena — including stocked ponds for dearly departed fishermen.

Mishaps (from p. 1)

reality. Somber artwork in subdued colors and the headline “Serious lawyers for serious injury” are supported by the goofiest toll-free number you could imagine: 1-800-U-HURT-ME. Ouch!

Opportunity lost

Two “Main Street” jewelry stores just doors away from each other are both closed on Wednesdays, totally blowing the chance to grab some of their rival’s customers who try the door, find it locked, and look down the street for options.

Hiding in plain site

Ever consider the text that comes up when someone bookmarks your web site? One business banker’s online banking page has the helpful title of “Log-on Screen” — no name, no other clues as to what you’re logging into. Why make it hard for someone to do business with you?

Nothing flashy about it

The website for a well-known sports trading card company comes to a screeching halt if you don’t have the latest animation plug-in. No “click here to skip intro” or alternative site for the techno-challenged — just that annoying red X.

Have a mishap to contribute... preferably a competitor’s and not your own? Email suggestions to compost@fahouryink.com.

New and Notable

Small twists on an existing idea can sometimes translate into big innovations. The best make you wonder “what took so long?” Here are a few simple-but-brilliant products to look for on store shelves, many of which were featured in *BusinessWeek’s* Best Products of the Year for 2002:

- Shake the new Forever Flashlight back and forth for 20-30 seconds and you’ll generate enough power to shine the light for about five minutes. No batteries required.
- Dutch Boy’s new Twist & Pour plastic container has a built-in handle and spout — light, neat, and no need to pry it open with a screwdriver.
- Ketchup bottles from Heinz and Hunt’s are designed to rest on their caps — no more mad shaking or digging into the bottle with a butter knife.
- Saran Wrap disposable cutting sheets — keeps counters germ-free, with no sticky cutting board to wash.
- Discover key card — a smart take on the now-ubiquitous key tag from your gym or supermarket.

Put on your thinking cap and get inspired! What small tweaks to your product or service could turn into an entirely new revenue stream?



BUNDLING: The New Killer App

It’s a dog-eat-dog world out there — and sometimes your customers feel like they’re wearing Milkbone underwear. So what can you do to ease their pain?

Bundling! Think of ways you can “package” your services to add convenience, increase value, and upsell customers while their wallet’s already out. Some ideas:

- Web developers can extend their interaction with customers beyond simply building a site by providing site marketing services — registration of keywords, submission to search engines...even color postcards of the home page for the client to distribute.
- A convenience store near the train station sets up an outpost for dry cleaning drop-off — leave your lucky interview suit in the AM, pick it up on the way home.
- A florist joins forces with a photographer, hair/nail salon, and formalwear provider to create a convenient package for frazzled brides-to-be.
- Our favorite: the sandwich truck outside the courthouse in downtown Newark, NJ is a licensed notary public. Going to court and need something notarized? Grab a bagel and get it done with one-stop shopping. A simple yet brilliant example of right place, right time.

Brainstorming

(from p. 1)

helping people loosen up and get their creative juices flowing. (We highly recommend Play-Doh, a personal favorite.) And don't forget some creative jumpstarters: glossy stock photo catalogs, ad award and design annuals, hip magazines, and a computer with web access.

4) Showtime! Start the session with a welcome from the team leader (that's you again) and an overview of the project. Here's where you review the *Five Golden Rules of Brainstorming*:

1. All wacky, out-there ideas will be warmly welcomed.
2. Negative comments or "been there, done that" attitudes will not.
3. "Paradigm" and other meaningless buzzwords are banned from passing anyone's lips.
4. Build on ideas, don't shoot them down in mid-flight.

5. No interruptions — no cell phones, pagers, or Palms.

Once ground rules are set, get the ball rolling by reading the focus statement and noting some preliminary ideas as examples. The idea is to make this look easy — think of a few ideas in advance so you're not caught with your pants down in front of the group. As team leader, try to:

- Contribute to the dialogue without being too controlling. Gently bring the discussion back into focus when it wanders.
- Encourage participation from everyone. Avoid having one person hold center stage for too long.
- Introduce jumpstarters from your bag of tricks when energy or enthusiasm falters.

About halfway through the session, call a brief timeout to evaluate the ideas you've generated. Take a vote on each and toss the bad ones. Then examine the remainder, asking the group for ways to improve or expand upon them.

5) Assign homework. About 15 minutes before the end of the session, stop and summarize what's been accomplished, then assign 'next step' tasks. Maybe your purchasing guru is checking out prices, or an art director is creating thumbnails based on ideas for new product packaging. Be sure to specify who's doing what, and more importantly, by when.

Last steps: Send a thank-you memo to all participants summarizing the session, and be sure to keep everyone in the loop as any ideas reach fruition. A good brainstorming session is like a good book: you're not satisfied until you know the ending! Hope yours is a happy one.

Size Really Doesn't Matter

You don't have to be a big-budget conglomerate to market smarter. Somebody at the local gutter cleaning company had a simple stroke of genius — using bold orange bags emblazoned with their name and 800 number to haul to the curb all the icky stuff they pull out of your gutters. Bags sit there in plain sight until the next trash pickup, giving the company tons of free exposure for up to a week.

Press releases: CPR for your business

It's a simple business equation: Exposure = awareness = customers. Your company's ultimate success or failure is directly related to the amount of exposure it receives...or not. But, don't dismay! Lagging sales can often be goosed by the simplest of tools — the press release.

A good press release is like a well-timed kick in the pants. It gets you thinking about what's truly newsworthy, and what you need to do to get there if you're not. A newsworthy product is one that is new, innovative, or suddenly available in new markets or via alternate channels. Product now available for sale through your secure website? That's news. Product celebrating its 10th anniversary? Big yawn, unless you dress it up in something creative you're doing to mark the milestone.

Press releases drive you to be creative, finding new angles or a different way to spin the same old story. Giving an employee award? Tie it into Plant the Seeds of Greatness Month and you've maybe found yourself some coverage.

(cont'd on p. 4)

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“But Who’s Going To (insert your excuse here)?”

Stop procrastinating and start focusing! Learn the tips that life coaches use to make their clients happier, more focused, and more profitable.

1. Dump it or delegate it. Face it, there are things in your job you just hate to do. Until now, you’ve been pushing yourself to do them because no one does it as well as you, right? Wrong. If your heart’s not in it, you’re probably not being as effective as you think. So if it’s something you can dump, do it. If you can’t ditch it, train a staff member or assistant to do it really well, then delegate. Free up your energy for the things you’re good at.

2. Marketing a business can seem like a full-time job unto itself. That’s why it’s critical to manage your time well — prioritize and handle first things first. Spend a few minutes each morning setting realistic goals for the day — do you want to connect with prospects? Get some client work done? Be proactive and

design your day. It’s too easy to get sucked up into doing time-consuming busywork that doesn’t generate business.

3. Get an assistant. If you’re the rainmaker or the face representing the company, your time is best spent marketing and meeting new people. Leave the envelope stuffing to someone else. Can’t afford full-time help? Find a high school honor student to help with filing after school, or consider an offsite virtual assistant who only bills for time worked. Find one at www.IVAA.com.

4. Put your personal stamp on everything you do. Your work should be a reflection of who you are, so take joy and pride in it and be creative with it. Even something as mundane as sending a follow-up to a prospect can be done with a little originality if you put your mind to it.

5. Get it done right now. The road to hell is paved not with good intentions, but with big projects planned but not done. When you think of it, do it. In a moment you’ll be thinking of something else. So if you have a flash of brilliance, jot it down, make the phone call, send the e-mail.

Chipping away at big projects will get you there, but only if you start right now.

Business coach Maria E. Andreu works with professionals and entrepreneurs to help them make more money, have more focus and work more effortlessly. Reach her at maria@MariaEAndreu.com or (201) 363-1576.

PR CPR (from p. 3)

No matter how newsworthy you are, promoting it to the wrong audience is like asking Wayne Newton to open the show for Eminem. Irrksome to your audience, and downright dangerous for Wayne. Do your homework and identify the target that really needs or wants this information. Maybe your kitschy employee award isn’t worthy of the business section, but chances are a touchy-feely community editor could find a home for it.

One final tip: don’t write your press release like a sales pitch. A good release reads like an article, focusing on the issues and why yours is just the company to solve them. Successful reporters are nosy at heart — tease them with enough of a taste and they’ll be clamoring for more.



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