

**Seriously
creative**

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We work in a world dominated by serious businesses. Their technologies protect millions of people online, power billions in payments, and provide support to all kinds of organisations around the world.

“Me too” and boring research questionnaires ideas simply don’t work for these guys. But B2B and tech firms can still be creative with their campaigns. Wildly so. It just means working harder, thinking deeper and ensuring everything is brutally focussed on a business outcome.

Thinking creatively about research

To be creative, we often think of people chucking ideas around at random, waiting for something to stick. But there need to be guidelines and structures. Without that, you’re doomed to failure.

We believe to be creative you need to do the following:

- Think differently: this is easier said than done. Let’s revisit this in a moment.
- Think commercially: every idea needs to drive action and achieve the desired result
- Think clearly: it needs to be simply packaged and explained

So, there you go. Simple. Well not quite. The art of thinking differently comes easily to some people, and less so to others. But it can be learned. You just need to keep a few things in mind.



1 Put things where they shouldn't be

This is the art of the counterintuitive. Anything that stands out from the crowd is going to work. For example, we once helped a printer/projector brand engage with people worried about the loneliness of remote working by putting a perspex office large enough for just one person in busy Covent Garden. It provoked people to see tech as something that connects, and that they wouldn't need to feel lonely.

TIP: It's often easy to say, "but why would we do that" and reject an idea. But that's the point. This approach works well for brands that want to disrupt their space.

2 Go to extremes

The easiest way to make a point or raise an issue, is by making it blindingly obvious. It's all a matter of "turning it up to 11" to hammer home a point. For example, we helped an enterprise resource management software firm demonstrate how it aids businesses to make decisions by discovering that a fifth of workers fear being sacked for making a poor decision without the right information.

TIP: Define the single thing you want to communicate and be singular about it. Don't try and combine messages.

3 Change the conversation

Sometimes a questionnaire designed to highlight the benefit of an abstract piece of software can be tough and, frankly, dull. Often, it's better to use a metaphor or engage people with a different, but relevant message. For example, we helped a datacentre colocation provider engage with datacentre managers by talking about the stress of their jobs, rather than the technology they use. We also helped a geographical information system software firm explain the benefits of visually representing data by showing that modern life is leading to information overload in the workplace.

TIP: Think about the problems your product or service solves – and focus on the human elements. Think about how you affect people within businesses, not just the business itself.

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The ‘idea’ process

Where do ideas come from? How can you get yourself or those around you into a creative frame of mind?

1 Brainstorms don’t work...

unless they’re carefully managed. In fact, there are several schools of thought that brainstorming inhibit creativity. According to Harvard Business Review, social loafing creeps in because people put in less effort in a group than they would individually. Then there’s social anxiety which means we don’t get to hear the great ideas of the introverts. And many introverts are creative people.

If you must have a brainstorm, make sure everyone has done their research beforehand and comes to the meeting enthusiastic and ready to share their prepared ideas. Then you will see them evolve creatively and practically as people ask questions and make suggestions.

And while we don’t want a free-for-all where people start shouting out anything that pops into their heads, remember that creativity in groups works better when people are enjoying themselves, feel happy about making mistakes and where the environment is playful. Don’t be the boss that looks into the eyes of the most junior person in the room and says “there’s no such thing as a stupid idea. Only a stupid person” before waiting by a blank whiteboard tapping their foot with a scowl on their face. We’ve seen it happen and it doesn’t encourage creativity.

2 You don’t have to be an expert...

in something to be creative at it, but knowledge is important. Whatever you are working on, conduct your own research. View related TED talks, search YouTube, find a mentor, use research, read the press, ask questions, delve deeply into the topic you are working on. The more you know, the more ideas will creep into your head.

3 Cuddle the dog

Better still, move. Get up. Walk the dog. Look around you for inspiration. Be mindful all the time of the challenge you are working on. Ideas come to us when they want, not when you want. Pay attention to your thoughts and have a pen handy – a shower-proof one if necessary. Or an app. Or send yourself an email. Whatever it takes.

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4 Think in problems

If you are trying to find an idea to promote a product, think of the problem people have. Then think of the consequences if the problem is not solved. So, if you want to promote a desk-tidy, think problem – an untidy desk. Then think of the consequence – poor productivity.

5 Churn out lots of ideas

If 99 of 100 are crap, then you have one good one. Just keep going. Mind-mapping is one way to do this by keeping the central idea (or problem) as the kernel and then branch out from there.

6 Will it work?

There are plenty of great ideas germinating in pubs up and down the country. You can hear them a mile off. But great ideas are useless without effective execution which is why so many ideas stay in the pub along with the people who came up with them. Keep your idea simple and practical. If you can’t explain it in a sentence, think again. And above all, can you execute it?



Get going

Being serious about creativity is important. We all need to remember that it's tough to come up with a brilliantly simple idea – especially for brands that are complex and deal with abstracts. Ironically, the best creative ideas look obviously excellent and effortless – despite the huge amounts of work that probably went into them.

But armed with the right thinking, we can all become a little bit more creative.





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