

industrial consultants, advertising agencies, marketing research firms, and industrial publications. However, their chances of receiving serious attention often depend on someone in the organization making the role of product champion.

STUDYING COMPETITORS Companies can find good ideas by researching the products and services of competitors and other companies. They can find out what customers like and dislike about competitors' products. They can buy their competitors' products, take them apart, and build better ones. Company sales representatives and intermediaries are a particularly good source of ideas. These groups have firsthand exposure to customers and are often the first to learn about competitive developments. Electronic retailer Best Buy actually checks with venture capitalists to find out what start-ups are working on.

ADOPTING CREATIVITY TECHNIQUES Internal brainstorming sessions also can be quite effective—if conducted correctly. “Marketing Memo: How to Run a Successful Brainstorming Session” provides some brainstorming guidelines.

The following list is a sampling of techniques for stimulating creativity in individuals and groups.⁵⁷

- **Attribute listing.** List the attributes of an object, such as a screwdriver. Then modify each attribute, such as replacing the wooden handle with plastic, providing torque power, adding different screw heads, and so on.
- **Forced relationships.** List several ideas and consider each in relationship to each of the others. In designing new office furniture, for example, consider a desk, bookcase, and filing cabinet as separate ideas. Then imagine a desk with a built-in bookcase or a desk with built-in files or a bookcase with built-in files.
- **Morphological analysis.** Start with a problem, such as “getting something from one place to another via a powered vehicle.” Now think of dimensions, such as the type of platform (cart, chair, sling, bed), the medium (air, water, oil, rails), and the power source (compressed air, electric motor, magnetic fields). By listing every possible combination, you can generate many new solutions.
- **Reverse assumption analysis.** List all the normal assumptions about an entity and then reverse them. Instead of assuming that a restaurant has menus, charges for food, and serves food, reverse each assumption. The new restaurant may decide to serve only what the chef bought that morning and cooked; may provide some food and charge only for how long the person sits at the table; and may design an exotic atmosphere and rent out the space to people who bring their own food and beverages.

marketing Memo

How to Run a Successful Brainstorming Session

If done correctly, group brainstorming sessions can create insights, ideas, and solutions that would have been impossible without everyone's participation. If done incorrectly, they are a painful waste of time that can frustrate and antagonize participants. To ensure success, experts recommend the following guidelines:

1. A trained facilitator should guide the session.
2. Participants must feel they can express themselves freely.
3. Participants must see themselves as collaborators working toward a common goal.
4. Rules need to be set up and followed, so conversations don't get off track.
5. Participants must be given proper background preparation and materials so they can get into the task quickly.
6. Individual sessions before and after the brainstorming can be useful for thinking and learning about the topic ahead of time and for reflecting afterward on what happened.
7. Brainstorming sessions must lead to a clear plan of action and implementation, so the ideas that materialize can provide tangible value.
8. Brainstorming sessions can do more than just generate ideas—they can help build teams and leave participants better informed and energized.

Sources: Linda Tischler, “Be Creative: You Have 30 Seconds,” *Fast Company*, May 2007, pp. 47–50; Michael Myser, “When Brainstorming Goes Bad,” *Business 2.0*, October 2006, p. 76; Robert I. Sutton, “Eight Rules to Brilliant Brainstorming,” *BusinessWeek IN Inside Innovation*, September 2006, pp. 17–21.