Creativity – The Real Business Edge

Can there be any doubt that the most critical differentiating factor and key competitive advantage a company can have is creativity? Gone are the days when one product was able to separate itself out from the competition through higher quality. The name of the game now is distinctiveness. If you manage to capture the quality and be unique, the market is all yours.

The notion that you can create creativity, as ironic as it sounds, is erroneous. You cannot transform a group of people who are devoid of creative thinking into a creative force. What you can do is develop the atmosphere of support and encouragement that will allow creativity to flourish once you have the right people in place and the creative juices flowing. Once you have come to recognize the importance of creativity, there are a number of tactics that can be used to boost imagination and originality so that they become typical processes within your organization.

Tudog's slogan, "Original Thinking™" indicates that we embrace the concept of creativity and we recognize the impact even just one breakthrough idea can have on a company – from the products sold, to how they are sold, to how they are positioned in the market, and even to whom they are sold to. The trickle-down effect certainly applies here, as more creative strategies will give way to tactics that better demonstrate creative principles.

So how do you encourage creativity? There are actual methodologies that can be used. And while Tudog will share these with you within this article, it is important to again emphasis that creativity grows and flourishes only within the proper environment. If you do not create a supportive atmosphere that embraces ideas, the application of any or all of these methodologies will prove futile. You must go beyond wanting creativity, you need to breed it.

There are 7 methodologies that can be used to increase creativity. They are:

1. Brainstorming – the most well known of the methods, brainstorming gathers a small group together and encourages people to think freely in order to generate a large number of ideas. The key with brainstorming is to avoid criticism of any idea so as not to suppress the mention of another for fear of ridicule. The challenge with brainstorming is that people who are not used to thinking creativity may generate relatively mediocre ideas. A brainstorming session is only as creative as the people involved. A way to supplement results is to have people build on to an idea that has potential but needs work in becoming distinctive.

2. Hypotheticals - this method suggest sort of a practice run so that the group can work on getting their creativity going with a hypothetical challenge before moving on to the real issue. There are two schools of thought with regard to the type of hypothetical presented, with one school suggesting something as close to the genuine problem as possible, and the other recommending a topic unrelated and simple. Each school has its virtues and the type of issue requiring the creativity should help dictate which school you adhere to for that particular problem.

3. Modification – this method explores the product and has the group apply different changes to examine how each change affects the initial product and how useful those changes are. For example, under modification the group will be asked to imagine the product bigger, smaller, upside down, backward and so on. Each change will result in a different application or use, and these new uses are applied creatively to the market.

4. Development – this model forces the group to take the "new" product through the entire decision making route in order to test how it holds up under creative criteria. Elements include the product category, product, product characteristics, intended customers, packaging, pricing, distribution channels and others. The idea is that if you can envision the product in all its aspects, you can determine when and how to affix creative elements.

5. Problem Analysis – this method requires that all the challenges facing a product be discussed with an eye toward determining solutions to them. Once the solutions are discovered, in essence a new and improved product exists.

6. Combinations – the idea behind this method is that the group be led to explore new combinations such as adding new features, mixing functions, and the like. This often leads to new products or improved products as it forces the creative teams to look at the enhanced functionality born of combining ideas.

7. Attributes – this model asks the creative team to review products from the perspective of its attributes, looking at its purpose and how that purpose get fulfilled. By looking at each component that enables the purpose to operate, the notion is that new ideas will arise on how to improve certain components in order to improve the product or create a new product.

Creativity is not an easy task because it often requires the suggestion of change, which in itself many find intimidating. The need for creativity, however, cannot be debated. Those companies that demonstrate a capacity for creative thinking will be those companies that lead us into the future.