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THE Knowledge

Navigating the modern B2B marketing landscape

MARCH / 2020



Volume One / Issue 11

**THE
IDEAS
ISSUE**

EDITOR'S NOTE



“Leave it to the creatives” - something we have all heard and learned to respect in the world of marketing, especially in B2B.

We accept, unflinchingly, that only a select few of us can come up with new, inspiring ideas. But this is a misconception that shouldn't be overlooked; we are all creative - it's in our DNA.

Humans are gifted with an inherent ability to imagine. And the knowledge and experience we gain during our lives feeds this imagination, helping us to create. While some of us may be more tuned in to thinking creatively than others, we are all capable of coming up with new variants, inventions and solutions. We do it every single day.

However, it's difficult to summon an idea when we want one – especially in the workplace, or when under pressure.

In this issue, we explore how we can actively sow the seeds of creativity over time. By observing the world around us and continuously expanding our knowledge, we can train our minds to think outside the box and reformulate the old into something new. If we get this right, we won't need to chase after an idea - it will find us first.

Francesca MacKenzie
Editor

**“Imagination
is
arguably
the
most
powerful
tool
we
have
as
a
species —**

Francesca MacKenzie,

Creativity is the realisation of that imagination

Editor, The Knowledge

**— and
it
comes
in
many
forms
and
flavours.”**

CREATIVITY BECOMES US

What makes us human? Yes, we can use tools – but so do other species. We have strong family units – but so do other animals.

We have language and feel emotion but, again, this is not limited to us homosapiens. Our ability to think about the past and future, and imagine different scenarios, is what some would say truly sets us apart from other creatures on earth.

The world around us is two-fold; one is the natural world that we are born from – the earth, the trees, the birds and the bees. The second, is man-made.

Our whole way of life is constructed and centred around ideas that we have created from our minds and built up over time. Ideologies, cultures, religion, social hierarchies and money are -to name but a few- all products of the human imagination.

Ideas are everywhere, they are beyond you, me and B2B. This is hard to see when going about our daily lives, but it's evident when taking a step outside the box and looking in as an observer. And this is even more obvious today, in light of the global pandemic we face, as the world we have created for ourselves stands still.

Professor and author, Thomas Suddendorf, believes it is our open-ended imagination and ability to make connections between different concepts that has allowed us to foresee and plan for our survival. And making connections has enabled us to find novel and interesting solutions to problems that we have faced.¹ But we should remember that ideas aren't always good; they can make or break.

So, it's important to identify the difference between those that can provide answers and those that could create problems, when planning ahead. But while human beings may all have the ability to imagine, does that mean everyone can be creative?



*There's no learning without trying lots of ideas and failing lots of times. **Sir Jonathan Ive***



THE BIOLOGY OF IDEAS

Our brains work in mysterious and wonderful ways. According to Dr. Pronita Mehrotra, our brains allows us to voluntarily think of a concept which then triggers another concept, which in turn triggers another and so on, leading to a stream of thought.

Activating connected ideas and finding connections between random ideas are what make it possible for us to think creatively and come up with novel ideas.² But how do our brains actually work when it comes to making ideas?

It is estimated that the average human brain has about 86 billion neurons (or nerve cells) and many more neuroglia (or glial cells) which serve to support and protect the neurons. Each neuron may be connected to up to 10,000 other neurons, passing signals to each other via as many as 1,000 trillion synaptic connections, equivalent by some estimates to a computer with a 1 trillion bit per second processor.³

Mind boggling stuff, right? How on earth does it all fit in there? The point here, though, is that this is a vast, complex network – there isn't one simple part of the brain responsible for 'growing' ideas. The science of creativity is an evolving concept, and several studies have changed our understanding of the creative process in just the last ten years alone – discovering new factors that can help or hinder creativity in the brain.⁴

A major theory suggests that creativity happens when three of the brain's networks work together to problem solve. These include the default network - the brain's inactive mode; the executive network - the decision and emotion centre, and the salience network – which determines what things you notice or don't.⁵

But is everyone capable of the same level of creativity? Are we all born creatives? There are differing factors at play. Creativity has been linked to both nature and nurture. While some people seem to be genetically wired to be more creative, a number of studies argue that creativity is both a result of genetics and experience — the latter suggesting that everyone has the potential to become more creative and one does not trump the other.⁷

Some studies also explore the connection of getting enough sleep, spending time outdoors or holding brainstorming sessions at work as ways to boost creativity. Divergent thinking or the ability to explore multiple solutions to a problem is reportedly another way to engage the creative mind.⁸

2. <https://www.edcircuit.com/how-does-our-brain-produce-creative-ideas/>

3. <https://human-memory.net/brain-neurons-synapses/>

4. <https://www.creativelive.com/blog/science-of-creativity/>

5. Ibid

6. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/experimentations/201802/your-brain-creativity>

7. <https://www.creativelive.com/blog/science-of-creativity/>

8. Ibid



“For creativity, scientists hypothesize that the **Big Three** operate as a team: the default **mode network** generates ideas, the executive **control network** evaluates them, and the **salience network** helps to identify which ideas get passed along to the executive control network.”⁶

Grant Hilary Brenner,
MD, FAPA

IDEAS MISBEHAVE

Regardless of whether some of us are more creative than others, we all have the ability to come up with new ideas.

Let's remember that not all ideas are grand or revolutionary – most are far more modest than we are led to believe. To put it into the context of day to day life; we've all followed a strict online recipe, but then at the last minute added a pinch of je ne sais quoi because we imagined it might work well – using our sensory memory we can picture two flavours we know well working in harmony with one another.

At work, we have to come up with answers that solve various issues, present proposals to deliver on objectives, or plan how to tackle THAT meeting.

However, while we do eventually get to the ideas we need, they don't usually appear as quickly or as frequently as we would like. They are unruly and untameable, let alone punctual. Not everyone is gifted enough to summon a great idea on the spot.

Our circumstances or psychological patterns can also affect to what extent we can think creatively – hindering our ability to come up with an idea when we need it most. Stress, time constraints, a fear of failing – these are all factors that can repress our creative thinking. And this can have a huge impact on our successes, both in life and in our professions.

Neuroscientist Adam Gazzaley, M.D., Ph.D., suggests that the way we now feel constantly connected in the modern world, and the fact that we always having something to do, also dampens creativity — instead, people should embrace boredom and reduce multitasking to help with idea generation.⁹

FLIP THE SWITCH

Within the B2B arena, marketers are tasked with adapting to emerging trends, new market needs or most recently, global pandemics. The only way to adapt to new circumstances and come up with fruitful solutions, is to think in a non-linear fashion and get your creative juices flowing. But many B2B marketers feel uncomfortable or ill-equipped to think outside the box and offer up new opinions.

Harnessing your inner creative genius takes work, but it can be done. By observing new and novel approaches and beliefs, and continuously expanding our knowledge, we can train our minds to think differently. So how do we harness this innate tool we have at our disposal? There are a multitude of practices people can use to help themselves think more creatively.

Firstly, it is worth noting that no idea is really a 'new' idea. According to Mark Twain, we simply take a lot of old ideas and put them into a sort of mental kaleidoscope. We give them a turn and make new and curious combinations.

And according to James Webb Young, "The capacity to bring old elements into new combinations depends largely on the ability to see relationships." The relationships between seemingly unconnected facts, stories, memories, artefacts and items in various media, including personal experiences alongside things learned, seen, heard or read about.

Speaking to college students in the 1930s, Mr. Webb Young helpfully lays out five concrete steps to take, in order to more easily see new relationships and have a good idea.

It's a straightforward approach which breaks down the process of having an idea into a few key stages: researching and gathering elements which could be combined, mulling over that research, relaxing to give your mind the space to breathe, capturing the idea as it strikes, and fine-tuning to get the most and best out of that idea.

It's not a quick process, the mind needs time to sift on a subconscious level, as you consciously put the problem

aside and head out into nature, spend time with your family or read a book. When we do have a 'Eureka!' moment, it may strike suddenly, but it can only arrive when the brain has been subconsciously working towards it in various ways over time.

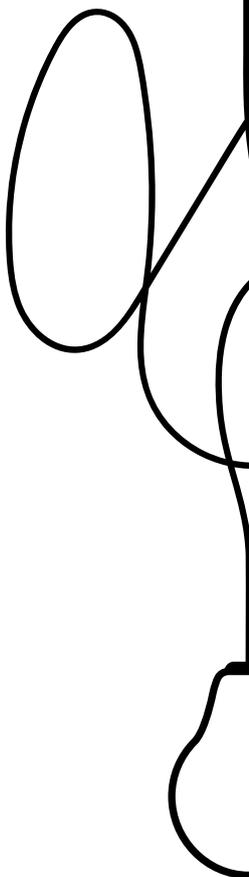
It's crucial to look far and wide for elements or notions, inviting unexpected sources of inspiration and rejecting very few ideas at first, no matter how off-the-wall or silly they might seem.

Crucially, gathering inspiration should be a lifelong process – not just a two-hour slot in the calendar. When a creative person walks through life with their eyes open to ideas and possibilities, they will quietly accumulate knowledge which may come in useful at any given moment.

Marketers, too, can improvise their way to an idea with whatever their memory has filed away – an article they read, a photograph they saw or a conversation they had about something completely different.

RELAX

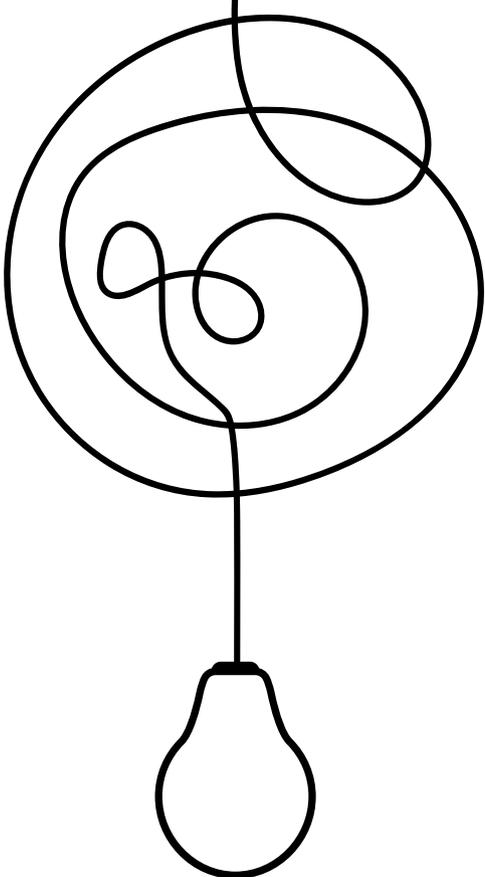
Put it out of your mind,
let your sub-conscious mind loose.



Stage two:

THINK

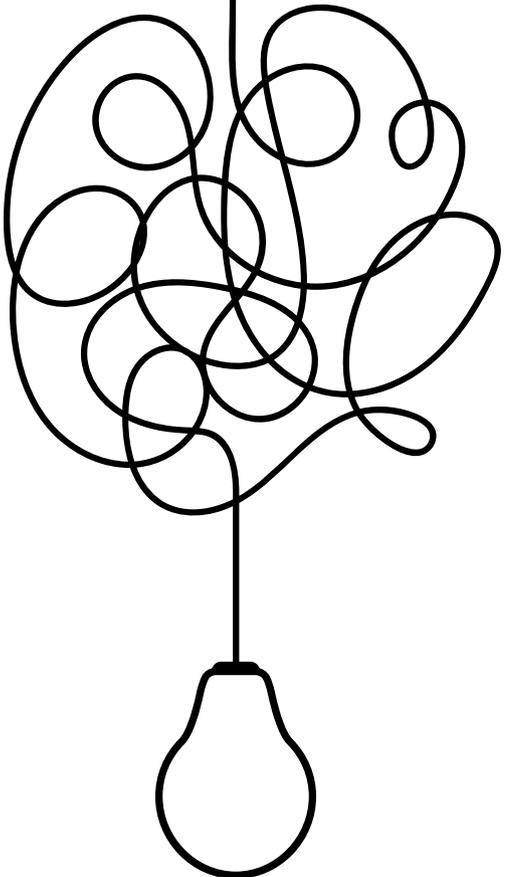
Identify connections,
write down every possibility.



Stage one:

GATHER MATERIAL

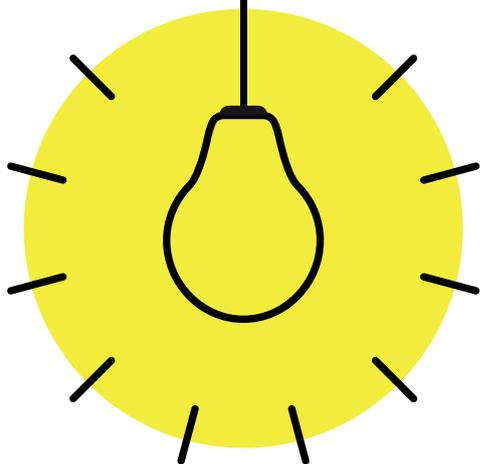
Both specific and general,
index and organise the information.



Stage five:

DEVELOP

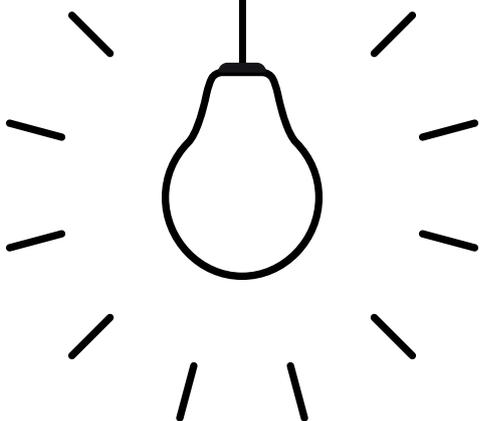
Refine and rework,
help the idea shine as brightly as possible.



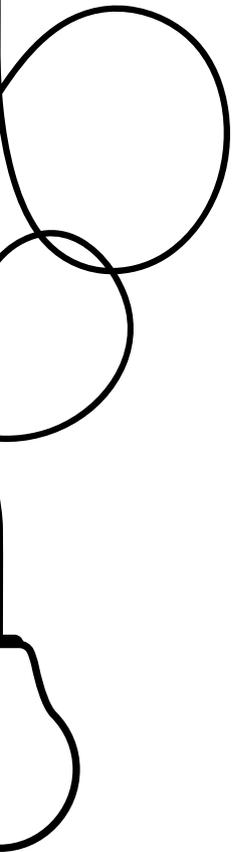
Stage four:

EUREKA!

The idea will appear!
ensure you capture it at that moment.



Stage three:



*Now more than ever
creativity is fundamental
in articulating points of
differentiation and the
value B2B brands can
deliver to their customers.*

*Commoditisation and the
paradigm shift we have
witnessed in the buying
cycle means ideas and
creativity are crucial for
brands hoping to truly
control the narrative
and develop meaningful
relationships with the
modern B2B buyer.*

Jon Hallowell
Creative Director, BDB

ARE IDEAS THAT IMPORTANT IN B2B?

The idea that creativity isn't required in B2B marketing is one of the biggest hurdles we face when innovating.

Creativity is not only required but in fact essential in giving B2B businesses the stand-out they both deserve and need to differentiate themselves in a saturated market and remain relevant in the eyes of the ever-demanding customer. The value of a good idea can be so great that it truly transforms a business.

B2B buyers tend to be more logical, stats-driven and their requirements often technical and specialist. But what we shouldn't forget is that they are human and react in the same way we would to those 'a-ha' moments.

As Steve Hemsley puts it, "Businesspeople do not park their emotions and personality in a cardboard box when they come to work and buy products and services."

In the marketing of the past, it would be the 'creatives' left responsible for coming up with 'the big idea' that defined the direction of a campaign or helped support an existing strategy.

But great ideas can come from anyone, anywhere. It's important to get a mixture of people involved in the idea generation process. Within a business context, however, having an experienced creative thinker involved in the generation process is key in determining whether what's on the

table is realistic, relevant and on brief. Ideas should be interrogated, fleshed out or, in some cases, canned. Many initial thoughts need to be broken down into smaller chunks, nurtured and thought out. Experience and knowledge of the market in question will help determine the value of an idea and keep the process on track.

"Most really great creative ideas initially sound stupid."

Jeffrey Baumgartner

CAN IDEAS BE CATEGORISED?

Most marketing activities begin with a goal, an outcome the business would like to achieve, whether it be increased sales, awareness, the list goes on. It's this goal that any idea generation needs to meet. So, in theory, it should be possible to categorise ideas by type.

Taking inspiration from Mark Pollard's recent exploration of the '16 types of Idea in Advertising', categorisation helps marketers focus on approaching and solving specific goals rather than finding themselves lost in a wilderness of ideas with no clear direction (hyperbole, yes, but it happens).

So, here are just a few of Pollard's categories and how they apply to B2B marketing.

1. THE BUSINESS IDEA

How do you market your business?

What's the thing that underpins everything else and drives you forward?

A business idea should be novel, something unique that the company offers that no other does. An attitude, a mission statement, a promise, whatever it is that sets your business apart – shout about it.

2. THE PRODUCT IDEA

Here we get more granular.

What is your business offering on a product level that keeps it relevant and exciting for potential customers?

You could be marketing something new or putting a new spin on an existing offering. A product idea finds a way to break through the noise of a saturated market and reach buyers in a fresh and innovative way.

3. THE BRAND IDEA

Within your business offering, you may have one or a number of sub-brands.

It's important to distinguish what these brands stand for, who you are trying to reach with them and how they all work together to create a unified identity.

Think of it like a triangle - your business sits at the top with your core message and the brands sit underneath, each with their own focus and product range.

4. THE ADVERTISING / CAMPAIGN IDEA

This is the idea that kicks off a product or brand campaign and is the basis for all other communication that goes out into the world.

Every campaign idea should have a clear goal in mind – what is it you're asking the buyer to do and what results would you like to see?

Whether it be conversions, sales, new leads – whatever the goal, keep referring back to it at every stage of the ideas generation process.

As Pollard highlights, all of these ideas feed into each other – so if there's one thing you take away from this, it's to be aware of how one idea can influence all aspects of a business' marketing strategy and the need for considered alignment.

BUT IS IT ANY GOOD?

How do you know whether your ideas are great for business, or only great in your head? Here are six essential tips to help you evaluate:

1. KNOW YOUR GOAL

As mentioned earlier, we have ideas because we want to achieve goals or solve problems. In order to do that, it's important to know what you're trying to accomplish. Think about what you are trying to achieve in concrete metrics, and how this idea can get you there or get you closer.

2. DO YOUR RESEARCH

In order to set a worthwhile, achievable goal, it's important to have done your research, not only in terms of appropriate metrics but also in terms of, for example, stakeholder mapping or audience demographics. Who is this idea for and how will it best reach them? As you develop your idea, research should be ongoing at every stage – whether you're looking into the provenance of a design you like or trying to predict consumer response to a concept you're mulling over.

3. MOVE WITH WORDS

The best ideas always have the power to move people. We express most marketing ideas in words, and words are powerful tools and symbols of emotion. Understanding words, their intricacies and double meanings, can help you to express your idea in the most direct and impactful way.

Need a way to make this easier? Read diversely. Try mixing LinkedIn blogs with classic novels, or topical long-reads with poetry, absorbing as you go.

4. ASK FOR FEEDBACK

That's what colleagues are for. You'll never know how your idea hits if you keep it in a vacuum.

It's vital to get the input of those around you, who can offer a perspective you might never have seen yourself, bringing their own history of accumulated notions to the table. Their expertise will be invaluable during the all-important idea-refining stage.

5. START SMALL

Putting all your eggs in one basket has never been a good idea. Don't sink lots of money and effort into executing a half-baked idea that still needs tweaking or testing.

Every idea gets better when you've had a chance to see it in action for the first time. Start small and first test your ideas with limited user groups, in specific markets only, or with a gradual rollout – whatever fits best.

6. ROLL WITH THE PUNCHES

It's okay to have bad ideas. In fact, we insist you have bad ideas. Bad ideas are part of the creative process of trial and error.

Even the ideas that don't work can contain seeds of inspiration which turn into other ideas – maybe even great ones. As Seth Godin puts it, “dance with fear, and use it as a compass.” Intuition is a powerful tool for understanding whether an idea really works or not.



TRUE CREATIVITY and transformational idea generation can only occur by establishing **COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS** that redefine the traditional agency / client model.

The honesty and candor that this fosters, **DRIVES INVENTION** and uncovers creative answers that transcend channel or tactic. Delivering **OUTCOMES NOT OUTPUTS**.

Jon Hallowell, Creative Director, BDB

MAKING IT HAPPEN

How can B2B marketers bring their ideas to life? No good idea should stay static in an old notebook or a forgotten desktop file – they need to be introduced to the real world, which often means they morph and evolve a little over time.

A good idea is inherently a living thing, and a good marketer must act to seed, nourish and nurture an idea to keep it alive and growing.

As Glenn Llopis puts it in Forbes, “Most great ideas remain dormant because people don’t have the courage, resources, time and/or money to take action.”¹⁰

According to Llopis, it takes an appetite for risk, patience, thick skin and good sales technique to bring an idea to life, along with a sense of passion and purpose and, notably, a focus on building momentum through continuous improvement.

Even the greatest ideas must be continually re-evaluated and updated as necessary, in order to keep them relevant and effective.

But we also can’t forget the long-term roll out of an idea – executing it well and making sure it stretches out across more than one siloed piece of collateral. Like content, creative

needs to leave a long-lasting impression and work harder to maximise impact on audiences.

To close this issue of The Knowledge, let’s ask ourselves: Why are ideas held at such a premium? Why are they so important in the B2B world? Well, in a nutshell, ideas are the spark of inspiration that, when protected, supported and nurtured, could give your business what it needs to not only survive, but thrive.

10. Glenn Llopis, Forbes.com The 12 Things That Successfully Convert a Great Idea Into a Reality, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/glennllopis/2013/04/01/12-things-successfully-convert-a-great-idea-into-a-reality/#4e14d95d4e86>



There is
NO
such thing
as a new idea.

Mark Twain