

Innovation Triggers

This discusses a checklist of triggers we have developed to help to inspire innovation. Triggers we have found useful are:

- **Connections**
- **Participation**
- **Information**
- **Service**
- **Green**
- **Responsible**
- **Speed**
- **The Long Tail**
- **Feelings**
- **Grandchildren**



A *trigger* provides some inspiration for an innovation. Think of it as a guide to some facet of your business that needs an innovation. One problem with the triggers is that they sound too general, and perhaps too obvious. Well, they are, but they belong to that category of things that are obvious once they are pointed out.

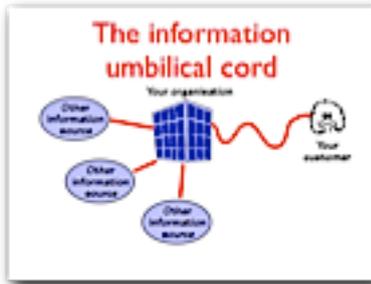
We humans are not good at having ideas without some kind of aid, but once given a direction, a problem to solve or some other influence, we are very good at having ideas. In other words, we are better at improving things than we are at coming up with something from scratch.



You can use **Connections** as a trigger for innovation. We love to be connected. Note the popularity of mobile phones, Blackberrys, social media, emails. Before that we had telegrams, faxes and letters. Such is the need to be connected to the tribe that people go to extraordinary lengths to do so.

Connecting customers to your business is a pretty good way of keeping them. For example, loyalty cards, frequent flyer plans, coffee cards, newsletters, branded credit cards, automatic software updates are connections. Even the humble branded keychain (provided you can get your customers to use it) is a connection. T-shirts and polo shirts with company logos are connections, especially when they are worn by customers (but not when they are worn by employees). There are many things we can use to make a connection between the customer and the business.

How can you use the idea of connections?



The information umbilical cord. Branded items is one thing, but you can also connect to your customer by providing him with a constant feed of information. This is information not only about your company, but other information that would be of help to your customers.

How can you create a better information umbilical cord?

Participation. People want to do more of the work themselves. Booking flights, self check out, parcel tracking, book reviews are all examples of participation.

How can you make it possible for your customers to participate in your business?

Information & Choices—your customers already have lots of information, and expect more



What can you do to give customers access to your company's information

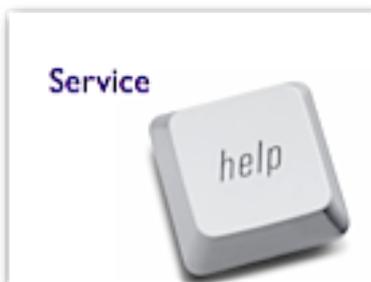
What do your customers want to know?

What information would they find useful?

What additional beneficial information could you make available to your customers?

Are you giving your customers any information that is NOT beneficial?

Service. This is something that when done well, will attract customers. If you provide the right service, and your customers recognise it as something they value, then you get to keep them as a customer.



Service is understanding the business you are in, and what your customers will want. They will all want help at some stage. To use this trigger you ask what extra service can you provide your customers? For example, home/office delivery of my product or service; auto renewal of subscriptions; and so on.

Put yourself in your customers' shoes. What sort of help would make your life easier?



Green. People want to be green, or at least, they want to feel green or seen to be green. This often translates into wanting to buy from companies, or use services / products they feel are green, or have been produced in a green way.

Green pays—many companies have ridden to success on the green credentials, or they are currently adopting green policies. Look at how British Petroleum, known as BP, are stressing their greenness despite being an oil company.

British Airways and many other airlines sell customers offsets for the carbon emissions from their flight. This does not necessarily bring in a flood of new customers, but it might well retain customers who want to be green. And let's face it, with so much attention (finally) being paid to the environment, being green is great advertising.

Here are some innovations that are prompted by the green trigger.

- Send out Christmas cards on recycled paper
- Send out your invoices, newsletters, etc on recycled paper and tell your customers that is recycled stuff
- Also tell them where your green energy comes from
- Ask your suppliers for their green credentials.
- Switch your incandescent lamps to long-life energy-efficient ones
- Tell your customer that n% of your office by-products are recycled after use
- Hire a sustainability director, or at least a sustainability consultant, and let your customers know about him/her.
- Send your obsolete equipment to a poor country
- Put your company's green message on your reusable packaging
- Recycle the products that you use
- Use the train instead of the plane
- Filtered water instead of bottled water
- Start your own company's recycling program
- Tell your customers where your raw materials come from
- Pay employees a bonus for buying an energy efficient car
- Use less packaging

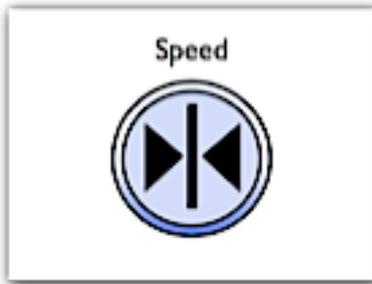
What other green innovations could you implement in your organisation?

Responsible following on from greenness is responsibility. Companies can advertise their civic responsibilities and become attractive to the same audience that is attracted by greenness. Responsibility might have the added benefit that it could well be cheaper to be responsible than it is to be green.

The intention of using it as a trigger, is that organisations can innovate products/services that display a civic responsibility. Ben&Jerry's Ice Cream was one of the pioneers at this. It bought them a lot of custom from the socially aware.

What innovative ways can you think of building greener products?

How could your organisation be more responsible?

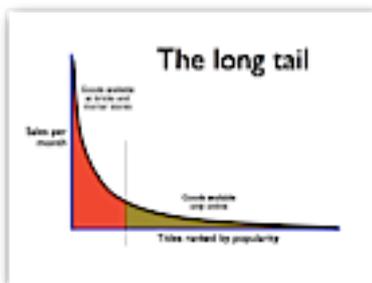


Speed. We have become accustomed to things being done quickly. And despite things being faster now that they were yesterday, we want them to be even faster.

How have your expectations about speed changed over the last 5 years?

The Long Tail. This was originally pointed out by Chris Anderson in an article in *Wired* magazine <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/12.10/tail.html>. To summarise this phenomema: Most bricks and mortar shops carry a limited inventory due to storage space and cost of stock. Naturally, if you are a bookshop, you carry the best-selling titles, as it makes no economic sense to give shelf space to books that are not selling well. A Borders, Barnes & Noble, or any of the major booksellers carry about 100,000 to 150,000 titles. This is the best balance between the cost of real estate to house these books, and their sales. However, the online bookseller has no such restrictions on size of inventory. For example, Amazon has 2.3 million books (not all of them warehoused, some are ordered in specially or are sold though associate sellers). At the time of writing Apple's iTunes Music Store has over six million songs available online. Wal-Mart, a major bricks and mortar music retailer, has 39,000.

The result is that the constraint of physical storage is removed, the (presumably online) seller is able to offer books, songs, movies, etc. that the bricks and mortar seller cannot. These extra titles don't sell in large numbers, but while they don't sell a lot of each title, there are lots of titles. The online seller has almost no additional cost to stock these titles, and taken together, their sales are considerable—30%-40% of sales in some cases.



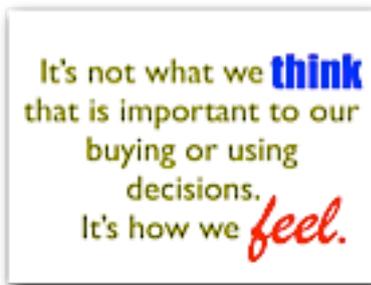
The graph shows how the **most popular titles** account for most of the sales. The Y axis is sales per period (month/year/whatever) and the X axis the **titles ranked by sales**. To the left of the separator are the most popular titles, and to the right is the **long tail**. The long tail accounts for some 30%-40% of sales, so is no small contribution.

However, these titles and thus their sales are not available to bricks and mortar sellers.

Why is this important? Because most companies see themselves as bricks and mortar, and don't consider products or services unless they have the potential be bestsellers. However, there is always potential to develop products and services that can make a healthy contribution to a company's profits without being the next blockbuster. This particularly applies if the product can be sold online, or if the cost of services related to the sales are minimal.

Also see:

<http://freethinkr.wordpress.com/2007/04/05/death-of-the-8020-rule-the-rise-of-the-niche-market/>



Feelings. How does it feel? Innovations are accepted or rejected based on how the consumer feels about them. This might at first seem to be very subjective, but many buying decisions *are* subjective. As consumers, it is the *experience* we want. As an example of what you can do, Barclays recently introduced the Premium accounts. Simply put, this gives you better service, you have a dedicated personal banker, you jump queues and get a decidedly better service. They charge for it. Ignore for the moment that Barclays are

charging for a service that not so many years ago you would have assumed you were entitled to. Given the levels of service that exist in most banks today, customers are anxious about getting a better feeling about their bank. Apparently, many are willing to pay for it.

How do your customers feel about your products/systems/services?

How could you make them feel better?

Grandchildren. The question here is, “What will my grandchildren do? What kind of product will my grandchildren children use?” Obviously, we have no real idea, and attempts to predict the future are generally wrong. The intention is not to be accurate, but to open people’s minds to the potential. Project yourself forward in time and speculate on the technology that might be available to you and the things that people might be doing. Does it suggest a solution that would please your grandchildren? Could you do it now?



Innovation Triggers

You can use the innovation triggers to inspire creativity by helping you to think about different innovation possibilities for the same problem/system/product.

To summarise, try using the following innovation triggers as an aid to inspiring you, your colleagues and your customers to come up with new, creative innovative solutions to problems.

- **Connections**
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