



What does “Idea Generation” really mean?

The term idea generation is a blanket description referring to any means of creating or developing ideas. There are various different techniques for generating ideas; from free association to mind mapping, with brainstorming arguably being the best known and most often utilized.

Brainstorming is a group [creativity technique](#) for generating [ideas](#) to solve a [problem](#). The results of a brainstorming session can be a complete solution to the problem or a list of ideas resulting in a plan, but more often than not is a list of potential ideas. Brainstorming originated in 1957 with advertising executive, [Alex Osborn](#)'s book, [Applied Imagination](#). Today the term brainstorming is often generically applied to the many differing forms of group creativity processes based upon this original concept.

Free Association, another type of idea generation process, depends largely on a mental 'stream of consciousness' of which there are two major varieties- serial and centered. Serial Association starts with a trigger, recording the flow of ideas that come to mind, each idea triggering the next until ultimately reaching a potentially useful one. Centered Association, which is closest to [classic brainstorming](#), is meant to generate multiple associations of the one original trigger so it can be more fully explored.

Mind or Thought Mapping are the various processes based upon a mind map; a hand-drawn diagram used to represent words, ideas, tasks or other items linked to and arranged around a central key word or idea. This graphic version of the classic brainstorming method is used to generate, visualize, structure and classify ideas. It is a visual aid in organization, problem solving, and decision-making processes.

Many software companies are now selling versions of Mind or Thought Mapping tools which supposedly aid in facilitating and recording this process.

Six Thinking Hats was a method developed in the 1980's by [Dr. Edward de Bono](#). The method is meant to promote fuller input from more people. In de Bono's words it "separates ego from performance". The key point is a "hat" represents a direction to think rather than a label for thinking. There are six metaphorical hats and the thinker can put on or take off one of these hats to indicate the type of thinking being used.

The criticism of Six Thinking Hats is it has to be learned and practiced, and the process supplies and training materials can only be written and authorized by Dr. de Bono.

The problem with any of these idea generation processes is the lack of understanding, time or focus of participants. The knowledge and problem-solving expertise required to

make idea generation successful are often simply not available within the organization. This absence of time and/or intellectual resources is only exacerbated by a lack of “buy-in” at middle management levels who don’t feel they can spare employees time for simply “thinking.”

While terms like brainstorming, free association, mind and/or thought mapping may sound good, they are only a step in the process, not the process itself. Using these techniques is appropriate only when you can define the end result, goal or objective.

So, whether you’re planning on storming, associating, mapping or wearing several hats, the first step should be identifying niches and emerging trends then applying industry knowledge and marketing goals. This will enable specific areas of thought to be explored and focused for potential new solutions. No matter if the ideas sought are marketing concepts, extensions of a product line or an entirely new product, company, or technology.

This focused attention on intellectual property is the very basis of “Distilling ideas” at The Still; assess the problem, explore the marketplace, define a niche, create Ideas, refine or discard, and develop a solution.

Idea Distillation is The Still’s proprietary process of either company wide, specific group, or executive participation in intensive Problem Assessment and solution-based Idea Generation- all resulting in a defined deliverable; a printed and bound compilation of the processes and results along with a solution-based summary conclusion.

About the Author

David Hickman is a Partner at The Still and has over 25 years of marketing and advertising agency experience. He has directed several national ad agencies in New York and Atlanta as a Vice-President, Creative Director, Art Director or Marketing Director.

About The Still

An intellectual property creation, marketing, and media consulting firm, The Still handles all aspects of your company’s branding and positioning efforts. The Still provides media metrics analysis, marketing audits, and market research, as well as marketing execution and idea creation. See http://www.ideaDistillery.com/About_The_Still.html

Distilling ideas, marketing & media

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