

CHALLENGE
series

How to Drive Marketing Innovation

- “ If you want to create a space for innovation, you won't get far by cloistering yourself away from the world and waiting for inspiration. Chance favours the connected mind.

Steven Johnson, 'Where Good Ideas Come From'

What's this issue all about?

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Marketers have always faced the task of balancing the art and science elements of their work. Whilst recognising the sensitivities of consumer attitudes, perception and trends – they also have to live with the reality of P&Ls, distribution costs and promotional budgets.



The good marketing executive appreciates the subtle psychologies of brand image and message and also what impacts in the market, and ultimately - on the bottom line.

However for marketers today, that balancing is sharper than ever. They are under increasing pressure to drive creative innovations whilst delivering proven results - and making sense of a mountain of reporting data. It is an increasingly delicate art: to balance creative thinking with hard analysis. So what does this mean for marketing resourcing and projects?

With the competitive landscape changing so quickly and even once established technological giants such as Nokia, RIM, Sony and Sharp struggling to retain their positions - innovation is high on the agenda in many senior executives' meetings. There are a staggering

463 million search result pages for the term 'innovation management' – and you can select from over 35,000 innovation books on Amazon alone. In their recent global survey – Cap Gemini reported that 76% of senior executives view innovation as a key strategic priority, and with changes in technology and consumer expectation; nearly 46% agreed on the need to focus on new product development.

However, marketers and innovators are increasingly under pressure to not only innovate quicker than ever, but to do so whilst making a profit. McKinsey – in their 'Making Innovation Structures Work Survey,' noted that over the past five years the need for innovation projects to show a profit has grown from 39% to 50%. This threatens efforts to explore new territory or develop cutting edge products, and in many companies can create a culture of stagnation and fear of developing anything new.

And yet many business leaders agree that they want more of it in their organisation. The value of creativity is greater than ever. Commentators such as Lynda Gratton, Seth Godin and Gary Hamel stress the need for companies to be bold, to move away from traditional approaches. Their logic is sound though. If you don't start to disrupt your business and exploit gaps in your current offering - then a new and surprising competitor will do it for you.



Yet when marketers can step outside their current paradigm and explore new areas they can face criticism too. In a recent blog, Gary Hamel, one of the world's leading marketing strategists, revealed that most CEOs he spoke with saw marketing teams as either delivering only minor, incremental step changes that do not innovate enough - or conversely, that they focus too much on developing unrealistic flights of fancy, that do not make sense commercially. Is it a case of damned if they do and damned if they don't?

More than ever, marketing leaders need to prove their department is still the home of creative pioneers - managing new thinking, brand innovation, product development and cultural change.

However that traditional marketing team responsibility for creating new products and exploring new markets is now a task sitting in the to-do lists of others too. In many organisations product development is heavily influenced by the expertise of non-marketing areas, such as IT, commercial, strategy and operational teams.

There is no shortage of data

Equally, marketers are facing the pressure of understanding the increasingly dizzying flow of metrics and statistics from external (increasingly digital) campaigns and internally, from 'big data', collated from sales, operations and customer insight. Yet, Altimeter reported that 56% of marketers cannot measure results from social media campaigns. And Harvard Business Review revealed that marketers either do not understand the marketing data being generated, or even if they do, they can often end up drowning in an avalanche of reporting.

Forrester noted that 46% of CEOs they surveyed agreed that understanding data and analytics was the main weakness of marketing departments, with only 25% of marketers said to be properly reporting on campaign effectiveness. The paradox however, is that the sheer amount of metrics, research and flow of information is greater than ever. There is no danger that there will be a shortage of business data. Rather, there may be a lack of insight that can inspire fresh ideas, innovation and new commercial success.

The dangers of over-cooking the strategic analysis are recognised too. Joi Ito – Head of the MIT Media Lab, was recently quoted in The

Financial Times, where he says: “In the world of complexity, strategy is your enemy and agility is strength.” This reflects the view, populated in companies such as Google and Mozilla, that in a world of fast moving start-ups and easy flow of customers, capital and ideas - ‘culture beats strategy’.

It is a view that resonates with another prominent researcher, Nilofer Merchant, who believes that we are entering what she terms - ‘the social era of business.’ She is quick to point out that the social era is about a lot more than just understanding and using the new social media tools and channels. For Merchant, the successful companies of the social era will be those that are most open and adaptable. New organisations, which can combine flexible working patterns and new technologies, have an ability to create and explore ideas quickly and challenge the existing larger players. Whereas in many traditional organisations, their layers of siloed management across HR, finance, IT and marketing, make it harder to be that flexible.

Morten T Hansen, in his excellent book ‘Collaboration,’ points out that the most valuable executives of this new era of business will be those that are ‘T-Shaped;’ possessing a strong vertical depth in their skill and knowledge but also able to combine well with others. T-shaped

managers work horizontally across their organisations to fertilise ideas and help build concepts with colleagues - regardless of who and where they are.

So how do organisations build a structure to innovate? And what does it mean for marketing – and how do they balance the demands to be both creator and analyst?

The Innovation Myth

The heroic champions of great entrepreneurship are often referenced when the conversation turns to building fresh new business ideas. From Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg, to the great British knights of innovation - the Sirs Branson and Dyson.

However, the belief in a single heroic character as a creator of innovation is wrong. In his excellent book ‘The Myths of Innovation,’ Scott Berkun points out the errors of being a lone inventor, waiting for that moment: a private epiphany of inspiration. Instead a vast amount of research suggests that good innovation is more of a team sport than a solo adventure. Rather than relying upon individual genius and hope for the best, the smart marketing leader blends a mix of creative talents and helps them build a common purpose around a clear business

goal, and it requires a high degree of personal communication and collaboration.

The McKinsey survey noted a strong trend for team and project work across organisations who wanted to innovate. This included strongly sharing across the entire organisation; strategic priorities (76%), knowledge (77%) and research (69%) to build a more cohesive approach. Organisations are increasingly recognising the need to foster greater team-work across the business by either delayering levels of management, and/or utilising the increasing power of social business collaboration tools (video conferencing and file sharing), to help speed up social interaction.

The importance of knowledge sharing, collaboration and team work as drivers of creative ideas and innovation is a consistent message in modern literature from practitioners too. Tom Kelley, G.M. of IDEO, one of the world's leading design and innovation firms stresses that effective creative teams need to mix different skills and personalities – the different 'faces of innovation'. And likewise Khoi Tu, the author of 'Superteams' notes that high performing teams need to contain talented individuals who are united behind a common aim. And in his book 'Team Geek' Brian Fitzpatrick, one of Google's senior engineers,

advises that no matter how good one's technical abilities are - to be an effective innovator you need to know how to work well with others. As Ronnie Wood says when referring to The Rolling Stones; "I honestly believe that none of us are as strong individually as we are collectively" (quoted by Khoi Tu in his book Superteams).

However, all of these commentators highlight that effective creative teams need to avoid 'group-think' and acceptance of mediocre ideas. Indeed, Khoi Tu suggests that some degree of 'creative abrasion' is often a common aspect of great teams. A high performer often requires a certain amount of stubbornness and that often means challenging others and saying no to weak ideas.

Let's talk about innovation

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Recently, collaboration and partnership specialist, Andrew Armour of Benchstone Limited met Duncan Thomas, founder of leading digital agency Pomegranate Group and leading creative and lateral thinking expert Paul Sloane to discuss where do the boundaries of creativity and analysis now sit? How do you create a creative culture within a team? And as a marketer, how do you balance the need to be creative versus the need for effective analysis?



Andrew Armour_ You both work extensively within creative thinking and solutions – but what are the innovation areas you most focus upon?

Duncan Thomas_ There are currently quite a few areas that we are refining or experimenting with but essentially our focus is in three areas: 1. Improving knowledge discovery with clients, to help us enhance the alignment with their audiences, 2. Introducing new methods into audience engagement and 3. is about understanding new technology and integration.

AA_ Is there a danger of missing the knowledge and discovery step?

DT_ We have sometimes struggled with getting clients to realise the full value of research and the benefits of running a deeper strategy phase, but we are innovating with both the approach - making the whole process more interesting and drawing more collaboration, as well as being able to deliver more results to the client marketing and insight teams.

AA_ Do you identify with that too Paul?

Paul Sloane_ Yes, it is hard to drive innovation at the moment but it is so needed. I run workshops to help brands with their vision and values and work with large organisations to help them to be more creative, Glaxo Smith Kline, O2 in Germany, Swarovski and Unilever. For example, I'm working at the moment with a large company to help them to build new products in the area of denture cleaning and denture adhesives – which is not a sexy subject but it's a very tricky marketing problem, to develop the products and understand the market.

AA_ What sort of innovation techniques do you use to help with that?

PS_ Well, for example we lead a product

journey. And the first thing I did was to get them to imagine they were the product (the denture adhesive) to get them to think differently about their product. We also use very advanced brainstorming techniques to get them to think about new ways of looking at their product, their customer and market. And by the end of the day we had a whole load of new ideas for them to take away. So yes, corporates can apply creative and lateral thinking approaches as a way to look at very solid marketing problems.

AA_ Is there a lack of creativity in business?

PS_ I think there is a huge dearth of creativity – in all sorts of sectors. And yes, it is harder to innovate and perhaps be more daring with how you do things when times are tight. Yet we need to innovate. For example, in the public sector, the only way to get more with reduced resources is to think better, act smarter and build different solutions. To find an answer means experimenting and ‘wasting money’ on things that may not work. And that’s something that in the public sector they are loathe to do. So the bind is, they need innovation but they’re often not willing to invest in it.

AA_ Can tough problems be solved with more creativity - rather than working harder?

PS_ Yes of course. Tough times can drive innovation and necessity can be the mother

of invention. With Nokia for example, their new innovations are being driven by the issues they have with the battle of mobile platforms (dominance of IOS/Android etc.). But that drive, to be creative and innovative can only succeed if the leader in the organisation mandates that they have to try things and really wants to do it and will allow their team to do it.

AA_ So, innovation has to be led from the top of the organisation?

PS_ Absolutely. It is impossible to build an innovative culture unless the senior leadership really believe in it. And I have never met a CEO or a business leader who do not say they want to be an innovative business. They all say they want to empower, be agile, be entrepreneurial and be innovative. And then, when you talk to the people in the business, they say they’re micro-managed, they’re not allowed to try things and the business is risk averse.

AA_ And why is that?

PS_ The CEOs and senior team – and the front line staff, both tend to recognise their organisation is not innovative and they’re frustrated. Often, it’s the supervisors, middle management layers that are often part of the problem and cause those frustrations. John Kotter argues that the thing that obstructs change most is the supervisory layer, all the process and systems.

AA_ Do senior people, who so often have to champion their products, sometimes struggle to criticise their own brand and product and get a break through idea?

a lot more than research. For example, with Virgin Atlantic, they introduced a really simple question – ‘how do we serve ice-cream in-flight to make it more like a cinema?’ The opinion from ground-crew and existing management was that the ice-cream would melt in-flight (no room for freezers) and it would be chaos. When they first tried it, the disaster ironically, was the ice-cream was served rock hard because it did not melt enough. So, they took that as learning and adjusted when and how they served the ice-cream in-flight and built a world first - serving of ice-cream during in-flight movies. You have to trial things.



A good innovation leader has to be both fire starter and fire fighter. They need to start things off, with that spark of an idea...

PS_ Actually it's in our workshops that most people find it easy to be very self-critical about their own brand. As a facilitator, I can just ask them to think positively or negatively and we take it from there. One technique we use is to get people in a group to work silently and by themselves, firstly writing down three words to describe their business to a friend. Secondly, three words that customers would use and then three words that competitors would use. And we move these about and we find there is a lot of truth and patterns emerge.

AA_ Many companies have shelves and online databases full of research, surveys & reports, yet many still struggle to innovate. So, how does market research fit into the innovation picture?

DT_ Well, Steve Jobs was famous for being hostile to market research and focus groups. Obviously if customers are telling you about unmet needs then you must listen to that but customers are notoriously difficult at telling you about things they don't know. But in most cases, it is experiments that are the most important thing.

AA_ On that basis, should the hard data be driving the thinking – or do we need to park it?

AA_ So good innovation is not just having creative ideas, it's about moving on to experiments and seeing what works?

PS_ I think you need to park the data for a while. You need to look at ideas that fit criteria and look to trial and experiment in a low cost way. Very often, small experiments teach you

PS_ Exactly. A good innovation leader has to be both fire starter and fire fighter. They need to start things off with that spark of an idea but they also have to know when it's time to put them out too and move on to something else. You have to listen to the facts you get from an experiment.

AA_ Duncan, how do you utilise all that data that is now available to digital marketers?

DT_ The data - makes it sound so clinical and it is to an extent but this data stuff creates pictures, patterns landscapes, which we can view, and use. Working with the client early to establish insights beyond typical web stats really helps the on boarding process by people outside the marketing team. When you introduce analysis points that relate to bottom line and brand impacts, we have found people are more receptive to bigger strategic thinking.

We work from the business objectives out, developing the approach and the creative from structured thinking. We then use data to see what's happened before, either from the clients' previous campaigns results or increasingly using metrics obtained from elsewhere. We want to avoid mistakes that have gone before - and we want to see if we can pick up key trends that we can build into our creative thinking.

AA_ But can you get lost in the sheer amount of metrics available with digital marketing?

DT_ That can be hard, and with the variety of data points you can access increasing exponentially, it is easy to drown. For us, the difficulty is in analysing which tools are relevant and accurate for accessing the data. Social media for example, has introduced a huge diversity of applications to review activity ranging from the free such as Social Mention, through to the heavy weights like Radian 6 and Alterian's SM2, but knowing what's right for your needs takes a lot of testing, and a clear understanding of what the client will benefit from knowing.

We typically focus on creating a dashboard of metrics that have been driven by the client project team. The performance indicators are drawn up in the early planning phase to ensure that we can extract the right data and deliver it in a relevant format for the client, such as through the CMS view, or a more sophisticated connection into business intelligence tools.

AA_ When do you stop analysing all that data that is now available?

DT_ You don't stop - it's a cyclical process. It's a constant loop of feedback and refinement, testing and development. You are refining the data points, retesting the user experience and developing the accuracy of the data dash you are reviewing. It's hard work and needs dedication, to such an extent actually that you

will find a host of new job titles have spawned from the need to specialise in data analysis - insight managers, data scientists, customer analysts and so on. Ultimately though, in marketing it is often about seeing three things: impact on the business, impact in the market, and what's working or not in the marketing mix.



The most effective marketers today now realise that volume of followers from social media platforms is irrelevant. They understand that they cannot plan and measure digital in the same way that you manage other marketing channels...

AA_ So, too much time doing and measuring the wrong activity?

DT_ Yes. I think the most effective marketers today now realise that volume of followers from social media platforms is irrelevant. They understand that they cannot plan and measure digital in the same way that you manage other marketing channels and platforms.

AA_ With digital marketing, is it still the best creative ideas that win big?

DT_ I've changed my view of that over time. I once thought it was all about having the best design team and creative. But now, it's very expensive to run with one pure big creative idea. It's the complexity of understanding we have now about things like audience profiling, behavior and engagement. This knowledge means that we can be more accurate than ever in positioning messages.

A core theme or idea still provides the direction and underpins the digital strategy but now marketers need to execute according to segments, channels and platforms. Take BT, at any one time they are running around seven different campaigns, targeting the breadth of influencers to decision makers. So here again the argument arises, is the access to data the component that is changing the effect of marketing, not a change in creative thinking?

AA_ With innovation being reliant on good ideas and talent - how do you find the best creative people you need?

DT_ Five years ago, it was all about their portfolio and finding that spark of genius. Whilst their portfolio is still important to me, I am now quizzing them at a deeper level. It's about creativity combined with the strategy behind their ideas. As an agency owner, I'm looking for a complete balance of creative mind, fused with analytic capability.

PS_ If you are trying to hire people you need to look for people who have a slightly rebellious frame of mind and look for hints in their background. With creative thinking, there are signals to look for and you can ask people hypothetical questions and see how they react. And creative people tend to have creative hobbies too – they don't just go fishing and watch TV. But it's not all about personality types. Some introverts are very creative and some extroverts are very creative. My advice is to build a good mix in a team of both left and right brain thinkers, so you have people who can use data and people who can think in an abstract way too.

AA_ Can anyone learn to be more creative though?

PS_ You can learn to be more creative with practice but the truth is some people are just more creative than others. It's like a song-writing capability. We can all do it, to some extent - but the reality is, no matter how hard we work, we cannot all do it like Adele.

AA_ Do creative people need to really love their work?

PS_ Pride is more important in some ways than the love as that's what drives objective, quality driven solutions. Love is fantastic but purely subjective.

AA_ In their book 'Team Geek' - Fitzpatrick & Collins-Sussman of Google argue that very smart people need to learn to work well with other especially when developing new products. How important is it for people to share, engage and work with others?

PS_ There is a lot of evidence that the most effective creative environment is a small and well-focused team. Interestingly though, one with a little bit of tension within it tends to perform best. You need a mix of new and old team members and some constructive disagreement is healthy. It's helpful to have challenge and debate – and you don't want everyone agreeing on everything, all the time. Likewise – you do not want people just loving their own ideas all the time...

DT_ But the principle of collaborative thinking is fantastic and where possible at Pomegranate we always try to combine skill and brain sets when initiating any project. Bringing in different perspectives alone ensures a richer tapestry of thinking, but if you can also layer in different trained disciplines, the approach typically becomes more strategically sound. The issue... time, and buy-in!!

The advantage of gaining structured opinion from tech, creative and strategy in a unified session is perfect, but we do suffer greatly from idea creep, then squelching! Getting this process working right is no easy task.

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Most radical innovation requires lateral thinking to be able to answer the question, 'is there a completely different way of doing this?'

AA_ What kind of team structures do you think work best to build creative thinking?

DT_ It's horses for courses really - ad agencies will still tell you it's about an AD with a great copywriter. However digital marketers - digiters as I call them, like us, will often create multi-disciplined teams, incorporating the creative, strategy and tech to streamline the idea generation process. Because at Pomegranate we run a flat hierarchy for ideation this really opens the doors for inspiring brainstorms that ensure that everyone, even the cleaner, pushes themselves!

AA_ Some creative experts I know favour a 'disruptive' approach to ideation; starting the creative process with insight & discovery then deliberately stopping the project for a few days - before revisiting it again several days later. Can you see the benefits of that approach?

PS_ Yes, it's a really useful technique. The aim with that technique is to get the unconscious mind to work on a problem and it's been used in a lot of fields; in music, in science and in

business and marketing thinking too. The evidence seems to suggest that when you come back to the problem again you do so with more ideas.

AA_ Is that approach related to lateral thinking?

PS_ It's linked to it. Lateral thinking looks at approaching a problem from a different way. Instead of building your ideas vertically – you look to build things from the side. Most radical innovation requires lateral thinking to be able to answer the question, 'is there a completely different way of doing this?' The answer is nearly always yes but to get the answer you need to look at things differently when you start. As Edward de Bono says 'you cannot go into a new direction if you're continuing to look in the same old one'. So – for example, no amount of incremental changes to aeroplane design would ever lead to the creation of a helicopter because they are two very different ways of looking at the problem of flight. Likewise, you may make hundreds of improvements in spectacle design but you will never get to developing contact lenses or laser-eye surgery. Lateral thinking encourages us to see things from a different view. For example, we often use displacement techniques to encourage new approach by getting people to consider their business problem using random words, books, songs or objects. It seems odd but it works as it just allows people to start thinking about their

problem from a very different place – and that can lead to a breakthrough.

AA_ Should innovation sit within a department - or throughout an organisation?

PS_ Ultimately it should be in everyone's job description. In the 1980s we had quality teams in organisations but now quality is built into everybody's job and I think innovation will be the same. It's good to start with an innovation team to get things moving, with a separate budget and direction. But the danger is that not everyone engages in the process. So in the end, to be really effective, innovation needs to be in everyone's remit.

AA_ : Gary Hamel said recently that too many marketers' attempts at innovation are either; just focused on small incremental step changes that do not truly innovate enough, or they come up with too many ideas that end up as wild goose chases. Do you think he is right? And why is that?

PS_ I think he's right and the issue is one of leadership. A leader needs to set targets and a system for ideas and innovations. They can say we want twenty incremental changes this quarter and three radical approaches to this area here. Set a budget, a timeline and test the results. Also, too often, in many business meetings, people do not follow the discipline

of good divergent thinking followed by good convergent thinking. Instead – too many people go straight into criticising the ideas of others. De Bono calls it 'the intelligence trap', as soon as you share your idea, someone else wants to prove they're smarter than you and introduce their one. In a well facilitated brainstorm it's mandatory to start by looking at divergent thinking, talking about unreasonable, sometimes wild ideas. And then from that long list can start the convergent process - using criteria to whittle down the ideas into things that have potential. But in my experience of running hundreds of brainstorm and creative sessions - I think it's a lot more effective to tame a lot of wild ideas, rather than to try to make dull ones interesting.

AA_ Is the definition of innovation becoming too subjective?

PS_ I think it can be over used. For me, innovation is the implementation of something new. Creativity is thinking of something new but innovation is about doing and delivering something new. Innovation normally requires spending money and taking a risk, developing pilots with some leading to successful new products. An innovation can be incremental or radical. And often, it is about finding things that other people have done and adapting them to your business.

AA_ So you don't always have to be the first person to innovate and create?

PS_ There are very few very pure new ideas – often it's about the execution. If you look at Apple, they just made the whole experience of using smartphones and music players better but they did not totally create those markets or technologies originally. Likewise – Samsung takes a similar approach to innovation, by being a very 'smart follower'.

DT_ One of the things we are doing with gamification and technology is to try to use what works in the games environment to help clients with their internal creative and ideation process, and help them to better share their ideas

AA_ Has gamification been used to help with idea creation and innovation?

DT_ Yes, currently it's one of the principle areas businesses are implementing. You're seeing explorations across a diverse range of business types from Government, i.e. Department of Work and Pensions to PHARMA, and even a couple of the big four accountancy firms.

The applied use of game mechanics is being used to stimulate collaborative thinking, helping to bridge conventionally siloed approaches, and motivating people across the business to get involved to great effect.

AA_ So finally, how do you both view the balance between the hard analytics and creative approach to innovation?

PS_ I think you really need both kinds of thinking; both analytical and creative. A great creative idea can be ruined with poor execution but likewise, great execution will not rescue a poor idea. In the end, the idea stimulates things but customers buy the delivery.

DT_ I think we agree on that. Increasingly, in the digital agency environment, those two aspects are working alongside each other. We use a lot of data, metrics and trends to help us understand what's going on and we feed that in to the creative thinking. But as Paul says – we still have to focus on creating those strong ideas. And we must work well within the parameters of time, budget and brand. As it's often said in the world of agencies; 'Picasso worked inside a frame.'





Duncan Thomas

Pomegranate Group

Duncan Thomas is the founder and M.D. of Pomegranate Group, a leading agency that start every engagement project with the people, the audience the community and the culture. The objective is always to build experiences that attract, inspire and evoke meaningful interactions. Today Pomegranate sees Gamification as a methodology with powerful benefits to enhancing the practice of engagement and motivational design, focusing on three key areas: innovation in marketing engagement, motivation through business applications and evolution in the socially impactful applications.

For more on how the latest digital technologies can be used in your next campaign get in touch via email: Duncan@pomegranate.co.uk or call **0207 336 7322**



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Andrew Armour is the Founder of Benchstone Limited, a marketing consultant and a specialist advisor and trainer in the areas of collaboration, partnerships and innovation. He has held senior marketing and innovation roles with Yell.com, Walt Disney and Television New Zealand. He writes about modern issues of marketing in his blog www.andrewarmour.com. If you would like to discuss how collaboration can give your marketing efforts an edge, email Andrew: Andrew@benchstone.co.uk or call **07971 231 025**



Paul Sloane

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Paul Sloane is the founder of Destination-Innovation and acknowledged as a global leader in the field of lateral thinking and innovation management. He is the author of seven books and consults and presents around the world to help business leaders drive more creative thinking and problem solving in their organisations You can contact him by email psloane@destination-innovation.com or call him directly on **07831 112321**

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