

# TEN **NEW** WAYS TO FILL YOUR IDEA PIPELINE

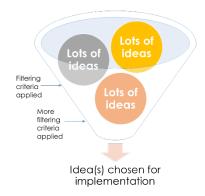




## TEN NEW WAYS TO FILL YOUR IDEA PIPELINE

If you are like most companies, you are on a continual search to generate ideas that will keep your company and product/service offerings fresh. You may have a phenomenal "stagegate" process that looks either like. . .

The funnel: where lots of exciting ideas come in and only a few lucky ones survive the drop ...



## Or, the linear "gate" process:

#### Stage-Gate® Product Innovation Process



In each case, many ideas come in, but few survive the scrupulous gate-keepers who winnow down ideas through Scoping, Building the Business Case, Development, Testing, and Launch.

Regardless of the method you use to select ideas for further shaping, refinement, and development, how do you get new ideas in the first place? Or as a colleague once asked, "what's the process for coming up with the lightbulb?" There are typical ways for "coming up with the lightbulb." We've all done brainstorming, with Post-it® notes and easel sheets. But what happens when the pipeline runs dry? Here are ten new ways to search for ideas.









An online idea challenge is a contest that you can run either for your internal workforce, the outside world, or both internal and external participants.

#### How is this done?

## 1. Create the theme and the challenge "brief"

Make the theme exciting enough and meaningful enough. It should be a real challenge you are facing. The challenge statement is often stated as "how might we....?" You might have a marketing challenge, such as "how might we reach the millennials with our new soap?" Or a technology challenge, such as "how might we help people find the best gasoline prices on their side of the highway?" In addition to your challenge statement, it is good to provide some details and constraints—things you're considering already, organizational or regulatory restrictions, the resources you would make available to the winning idea.

# 2. Specify the output you are looking for — A quick idea? A design for a product or component? A business brief? All of the above?

You may have an example to share, or you may just give people a list of what their response should include.

## 3. Name the prize

The prize can be a monetary award (from small to large), access to your experts or technology, or recognition of some sort.

## 4. Launch the challenge

There are many software packages and companies to help you launch your challenge. If you have no budget, you can set up an email in-box for accepting submissions. If you want to foster collaboration, you can set up a Facebook group, a wiki, or any other input platform that allows people to see other responses and post and comment on each other's solutions. There are platforms such as <a href="https://twoor.com/">https://twoor.com/</a> where participants can enter ideas and see comments on other ideas.









- 5. Rank and filter ideas: A designated group of personnel needs to read ideas and determine which ideas should be considered or which ones might require more elaboration. Experts, senior leaders, or participants can be included in ranking ideas using pre-established criteria.
- 6. **Follow-ups**: Select the winning idea or ideas, announce the winner, and award the prize. It is helpful to everyone to spell out why you chose the winners. Send a thank you to all participants. Most important, follow through on the top ideas and track the progress.

- ✓ Make the challenge brief clear, yet open-ended enough for happy surprises
- ✓ Broadcast the Idea Challenge in both traditional and new media channels
- ✓ Make the prize meaningful to the people you want to attract
- ✓ Remember to follow-up and thank all participants
- ✓ Don't get too caught up in which software package to use. Most important is that you seed the challenge and consider the responses in a creative and efficient way.
- ✓ Whether or not your first Idea Challenge is a success, try a second one, and a third, and more. You will get better at it!
- ✓ Use an idea management software vendor. Here are a few: <a href="http://www.capterra.com/idea-management-software/">http://www.capterra.com/idea-management-software/</a>











## aunch an Organizational Speed Networking Program

#### What is this?

An Organizational Speed Networking Program is a mashup of speed dating and business networking. This is typically used for career fairs or for romance, but you can also use this to pump your idea pipeline with many ideas or problem solutions quickly. During the organizational speed networking event, attendees exchange ideas and information quickly with a number of other people. The speed at which the event takes place increases the chances that participants will gain value from multiple perspectives and connections. It also relieves boredom.

#### How is this done?

## Spell out the goals

Is your goal to get a wealth of ideas? To allow people from different organizational functions to cross-pollinate? To have people solve a particular challenge? The goal of the program determines how you organize the event.

## Determine which format meets your needs

There are three basic formats that are used:

- Round-Robin in this format, people are in concentric circles or sitting across from each other. Each participant takes a turn either stating his/her problem or posing a question. The other person has an opportunity to respond, to build on an idea, or to offer a solution. After a buzzer or a bell, the pair switch roles. The bell rings again, and the people move along to a different pair.
- Station-based a station-based speed network event has various stations based on topic area. Each station might have a problem to be solved, a question to be asked, or a mini innovation-contest. Participants visit each station and add their insights. The station "host" may lay out a problem, show a short video, or present a poster. Participants may offer up their solutions on post-its.
- Group-based rather than have one-on-one interactions, a group-based speed networking event assigns people to groups or tables, based on the desired interaction. Each table has a certain amount of time to discuss whatever the table topic is. The group will record their insights on easel sheets or post-its, or possibly









they will be able to draw or write on tablecloths. When the bell or buzzer sounds, the groups may disperse and either move to the next table as a group or re-form into a new group at a new table.

## Lay out the ground rules

To get the most out of your event, for both your organization and attendees, set out the rules of the game, such as:

- Build on each other's ideas, don't knock them down
- Attempt to listen first, speak second
- Focus on helping the other person achieve his/her goal
- Observe the time clock
- One idea per post-it note

- ✓ Invite people who are likely to "play along" with this format and contribute to the group
- ✓ Give participants advance notice about how this session will work
- ✓ Plan this for a short period of time—this can be a half-day session
- ✓ Assign someone to take the results of the session and summarize/synthesize for the group and for the hosting organization
- ✓ Debrief with the group as a whole at the end of the event. Sometimes additional fresh ideas or solutions will emerge.











A Hackathon is an invitation for people to build something—or "hack" something together—quickly. (It doesn't mean "hacking" into a secure database or any other nefarious activity associated with "hackers.") Unlike a challenge that asks participants to come up with a new idea, a "hackathon" is saying "build a quick prototype to demonstrate a solution or new product."

#### How is this done?

- Frame the hackathon with a business and/or technical challenge that you want participants to solve. Provide a few alternatives. Determine the criteria by which you will evaluate the results.
- **Decide what the reward is**—a prize? The opportunity to showcase the solution to senior management, outside investors, or industry experts? Acknowledgement for participation?
- **Specify the tools, the language, and the output.** Will you accept a "paper" hack? In other words, can people provide a paper prototype or presentation of their solution? Or must they build a working prototype using a specified software stack?
- Give people a short timeframe, say 48 hours or 72 hours.
- **Decide whom you are inviting** to participate and what tools you will provide. Determine how you will free up time for people to participate.
- **Encourage people** to work in teams and provide an electronic bulletin board for people to exchange ideas.

- Launch this with a huge, exciting marketing campaign and announce it far enough in advance so that people who want to participate can clear their calendars.
- ✓ Ensure that management supports the hackathon and provides participants with the time and resources to work on this.
- Create a showcase for hacks—the results generated may not solve your immediate challenge, but you may very well discover a seed of a brilliant new concept or solution.











Startup Weekend is a 54-hour weekend event where participants conceive startup ideas, validate their concepts, and build a pitch for a judging panel. There are usually winning teams that receive prizes, such as mentorship, office space, free goods, or even money. (See more at https://startupweekend.org/).

Participants pay a small fee to join. On Friday night, participants give 60-second pitches for their ideas, and people self-select to form teams. Teams are typically comprised of people who can represent the marketing, technical, and business perspectives. Only the ideas with teams willing to work on them proceed throughout the weekend. During the weekend, people work round the clock and often fueled by pizza and beer, to refine their concepts, potentially build prototypes, reach out to customers or experts to help validate their concept, build pitch decks, and get ready for the final pitch event on Sunday. The sponsoring venue usually provides mentors and experts to help the team over the course of the weekend. The final judging panel may be comprised of local business experts, venture capitalists or other advisors.

Attendees are typically enthusiastic entrepreneurs, all of whom have given up a weekend to work furiously to start a business in 54 hours.

Imagine if you could harness that energy and infuse your organization with this enthusiasm? Why not host your own Startup Weekend?

#### How is this done?

- Decide whether you will do this during a weekend, or make this a weekday event If you are running this for your own company, you may not be able to get your employees to devote an entire weekend to building out ideas. You may choose to do this as a retreat and book a conference facility or hotel if you want participants to have that immersive and energizing experience of working like a startup.
- Determine who will be the sponsors and judges, and what the final prize will be Sponsors may kick off the event with encouraging speeches and provide the final prize. If this is an internal event, you may consider something like time off, time to work on these









ideas, or mentorship as part of the prize package. You may have both internal and external judges and mentors to provide support to participants.

### • Lay out the scope of the event

Are you restricting the event to a certain industry, technology, or business unit? Lay out the scope of the event and provide enough preliminary information to kick-start the team's idea pitches.

Spell out the judging criteria and final presentation expectations
 Startup Weekend judging criteria usually include customer validation, execution and design, and business model validity. You may provide business model or business concept templates to help guide teams. Final presentations typically include wireframes or fully developed sites or mobile apps, slide decks, videos, or product demos.

- ✓ Provide good food, comfortable atmosphere, and a relaxed dress code. Signal to participants that this is not a "business as usual" event, but rather something for them to break out of the mold and invent new businesses.
- ✓ Provide good mentorship and coaching so that people are helped throughout the weekend while they are creating products, validating ideas, and building pitches
- ✓ Loosen the rules around what is "in scope" but be very critical with final judging.
- ✓ Consider getting an outside judge or judges to hear the final pitches.
- ✓ Provide rewards and recognition—for participants, for audience favorites, and for judges' choice.









If you have been in a startup community, in business school, or if you watch Shark Tank, you know what this is. Startups expend countless hours shaping and refining their concepts, working on their business models, validating concepts with customers, and working up pro forma statements and revenue projections.

What business does this have in a corporation? A lot. Many corporations are trying to tap into the startup energy by launching contests to the external startup community. You can also do this with your own employees. It is one thing to claim that you want to be more entrepreneurial and another to take the plunge and encourage your workforce to act more "startup-y."

Unlike an Idea Challenge, a pitch contest requires you to pitch your idea, why it solves a key customer need, and how it might create value.

It is not as friendly as an idea challenge, where you may be celebrating and encouraging creativity. On the contrary, you are looking through the sharp lens of "will this make money?" and this is what might stimulate innovation. That is right—having to work with constraints, having to boil your treasured idea into 5 slides, or 5 minutes, having to convince investors that you will make money—lead to creativity and innovation.

The challenge of creating a viable business concept and creating a 10-15 minute pitch to your senior management is enough to get people energized and motivated to conceive of a great solution.

#### How is it done?

- Create a timetable as well as ground rules for how much time people can spend on this
- Seed the contest with criteria, driven by your objectives, for example:
  - Uses our existing assets
  - o Can be brought to market within six months
  - O Able to generate \$100 million revenue within five years









- Plan a pitch event, where senior executives from various divisions, or perhaps external VCs or experts, serve as judges
- Determine the "prize" for the best pitch or pitches, such as:
  - Time to work on this idea
  - o Financial resources to develop the idea
  - Adoption of the idea by a business unit
  - Reward or recognition for the team involved

- ✓ Provide examples of what the "gold standard" is for your contest.
- ✓ Encourage people from across the company and across levels to participate.
- ✓ Hand out a pitch deck template that provides examples of the output. Typical components include:
  - The problem
  - The solution
  - The product/service
  - Market validation
  - The business model
  - Competitive analysis (usually on a grid or chart)
  - The competitive advantage
  - Marketing roadmap
- √ You can see great examples as well as the original pitch decks from some of the most successful startups at: http://bestpitchdecks.com











A "Pitch Out" Event, also known as a "SwitchPitch" Event is a reverse pitch-off, where your company is the one who makes the pitch to startups, trying to attract their interest in working with your technology, business, product, or platform. There is a company called "SwitchPitch" (<a href="www.switchpitch.com">www.switchpitch.com</a>) that runs events and also has a platform, with a database of startups for corporate-startup matching. At these events, many companies, sometimes in the same industry, will showcase their assets and needs. However, you may choose to do your own. You can do a "road show" of your wares, visiting various startup centers and co-working spaces, or you can create a showcase event in one location and invite startups come to you.

#### How is it done?

- Choose what part of your company to pitch. Are you going to focus on one technology? One business unit? Several? Choose an area where fresh perspectives and advanced technology will provide value.
- Open or Closed? Decide whether or not you want to include other companies in your industry or industry partners. Are you inviting all potential startups/collaborators to see your pitch, or is it by invitation only?
- Prepare your presentation and demos. In addition to a slide presentation, provide demonstrations—of your product, your technology, your software.
- Determine where you will present to startups. If you are near a major metropolitan area
  where there is a large start-up community, you may host start-ups at your facility. This allows
  them to see your company facility (and potentially meet more people from your
  organization).
- Determine what's in it for the startup
  - Will you pay them? Give them access to your facility? Give access to your technology? All of the above?
  - O How will you arrange for the collaboration? Are you looking for employees or consultants, or are you looking for a partner?









- ✓ Staff your pitch event with employees who:
  - O Understand the value of your assets
  - Are great presenters
  - O Are open to working with external startups and not overly wed to what has already been done before
- ✓ Include people from across company divisions and functions in your event
- ✓ Get your intellectual property team on board and enthused about the new possibilities.
- ✓ Provide guidance to the startups as to how to follow up: whom to contact, how, and when.









Universities are hotbeds of innovation—and of the next generation of users and customers. Not only are university researchers working on experiments in the sciences, technology, and liberal arts ahead of commercial applications—university researchers are often excited to share what sorts of cutting edge things they are doing. Some universities have technology transfer departments that are set up to help commercialize their technology. Others are great sources of co-op students who will bring a fresh perspective to your project. In any field, a sense of how disciplines are taught offers a window into the next generation of products, services, and solutions.

#### How is this done?

There are a range of strategies for connecting to academia. Here are a few:

#### • Take a course

- There are an increasing number of courses taught online or available on-demand.
   Depending on circumstances, this may fit your needs. A team of people in your organization may be able to take a course together and share insights
- O Taking a "regular" on-campus course provides more than instruction in the subject matter. You will have the opportunity to interact with other students and faculty.
- **Schedule a field trip**—choose a university with a discipline or range of disciplines that will stimulate your organization. Set up meetings and presentations with faculty or assistants. You can create and maintain an ongoing network this way.
- Host a technology day at your company, where you invite people from various academic institutions to present their work on a topic, or topics, of interest. You might have a series of lectures, panel discussions, or interactive workshops.
- Locate a part of your organization in, or near, a university. Technology enables people to work from anywhere. Having a satellite or branch actually in a university will enable your workforce to immerse themselves in the university environment.
- Launch a class or department challenge, where you award a prize for the student(s) who come up with a winning solution.









- ✓ Go beyond the obvious disciplines. In addition to chemistry, computer science, or biology, consider whether there are opportunities to connect to departments such as social sciences, economics, business, or communications.
- ✓ Try this with any department in your company. Typically the R&D organization is the one to connect to a university. Other departments, or senior management, might find this valuable as well.
- ✓ Focus on potential idea nuggets. Do not expect fully formed concepts to necessarily emerge from your connection.







A field trip, or a field visit, involves getting out of your building and going to where customers are using your products or services. You don't really know how successful your product is without seeing it in action. The beauty of a field visit is that it allows you to see what customers are doing with your product or what they are doing instead of using your product. It can be quite humbling. You can pre-schedule field visits, especially if you need to visit customers at their place of work, or you can drop by and observe, typically when your customers use your product and service in a public place. A field visit will reveal:

- The context in which customers are using your products and services
- Problems or frustrations they are experiencing and how they react
- The extent to which available products are addressing their needs

#### How is this done?

## Articulate what you want to learn

It may sound obvious, but it is important to say up front what it is you are hoping to accomplish. The most important lesson is to avoid validating "what you already know." This isn't an exercise in stroking your ego—you are seeking surprises. Are you looking for general insights about what potential customers are doing? Or are you chasing down exact behaviors regarding your product?

## • Determine where and when your customers or users hang out

Where do you want to see your product or service in use? In a public place? In a home? In a business location? You may consider observing people at various times of day or in different settings.

## Figure out whether you want to interview people or just observe

If you are planning to interview people you need to plan your questions and prepare yourself for follow-ups and probes based on people's replies. You may also need to schedule people in advance. You may be able to discover why people have behaved the way they did with the product/service in question.

## Decide how you will "record" insights

Will you be taking video or audio? Snapping pictures? Writing in a notebook? Consider









what environment will be like and whether the customer will feel comfortable enough to be videotaped.

#### Collect artifacts

Miscellaneous objects may tell a compelling story and will help round out the picture of people are doing out there in the field.

## Keep your eyes open for surprises

The purpose of the field visit is to discover things you wouldn't know about by doing a survey or a telephone interview, or by looking at secondary research. You want to peek around the corners, or observe people before or after using your products to gain additional insight.

- ✓ Keep your preconceived ideas in check when you go out on a field visit. You may be surprised to discover that your assumptions are not correct.
- ✓ Leave enough time for open-ended observation before and after your planned times you may very well uncover an interesting surprise when you least expect it
- ✓ Vary the times of the day when you go out—both you and your customers behave, think, and feel differently.
- ✓ Bring people from across your organization out to the field to see the customers first hand.
- ✓ Have a framework and process for collecting insights. Get "quotes" in the customer's own words and pictures and artifacts to share, and don't overly filter or boil down your findings with "analyst-speak."











A story is a narrative, a retelling of something true that happened—with a beginning, a middle, and an end. A story affects both hearts and minds. Not only does the telling of a story move others; the creation of a story inspires the storyteller to innovate. In other words, you can use stories as a way to discover new insights that you would not have discovered otherwise.

There is science behind the power of storytelling:

Stories stimulate emotions, which may be the key to better learning, attention, memory and decision making. When we listen to stories, more of the brain lights up.... Stories cause your neurons to fire the same way they would if you were doing the actual action talked about....1

In short, Storytelling is about Transformation. As an idea pipeline filler, you can tell your brand or company origin story, which reminds people of the human side of your business, the reasons for your existence. You can create a future "brand story" or "customer story" for products—a model of who your customers will be, what challenges they will face in their lives, and how your products and services will help your customers on their journey. You can map current customer journeys by eliciting true customer stories, using your customers' own experiences, rich in context and detail.

#### How is this done?

- Understand the basics of "what makes a good story?" and share that among the team
- Launch an activity designed to mine people's experiences for good stories. You can create a checklist, have people write their own story based on a theme, or ask people to create mind maps.<sup>2</sup>
- Hold a workshop session where people share stories as a springboard for ideation.
- Build and share a toolbox and repository of topics and stories
- Provide people the ability to work with others to shape and refine stories.
- Organize your own **TEDX** event <sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> http://www.ted.com/participate/organize-a-local-tedx-event







https://blog.slideshare.net/2013/11/20/the-science-behind-storytelling-and-why-it-matters

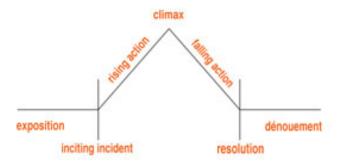
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Learn more at www.mindmapping.com



### Great tips for doing this well

- ✓ Get professional training on story structure—even a one-minute story should have all the story elements:
  - O A main character has a mission or objective
  - Obstacles get in the way
  - The character deals with the obstacles and either gets what he wants or doesn't, but is forever changed.

Here is the shape of a story:



http://www.ohio.edu/people/hartleyg/ref/fiction/freytag.html

- ✓ **Use real quotes and real details** in telling and sharing stories. Preserve the customer's or employee's own words.
- ✓ Use pictures. Pictures can illuminate the story, pictures can actually tell a story, or pictures can be used as a prompt.
- ✓ **Create a storytelling group**, "festival," or lunch-and-learn session. Invite people to listen to or tell stories.
- ✓ **Seed storytelling sessions** with themes, for example:
  - My Best Customer Service Success, or My Worst Customer Service Disaster (for customer-facing groups)
  - The Craziest or Coolest Customer Modification of our Product











A collaborative workshop is a face-to-face gathering of internal and external people from various functions, seeded with a goal and chartered to generate new ideas, concepts, designs, or solutions to problems. Workshops are ideal when you are looking for out-of-the-box ideas, when your task is not straightforward, or when you have a sense that the combination of varied perspectives and experiences will yield creative output. The workshop can be half a day, a day, 2 days or longer, depending on your goals. In addition to a goal, the workshop is usually set up with a pre-read, a "homework" assignment, or the collection of insights into consumers, trends, or data that will inform the work done during the workshop.

During the workshop, participants go through a number of exercises to produce output that achieves the goals set forth at the beginning. These exercises may be loosely or tightly structured, and may include individual work, small group work, or whole-group collaboration.

The design of the workshop—including the goal statement, the number and type of participants, the length of the workshop, and the exercises—depends on what you are hoping to achieve. The best workshops include clear accountability for follow-up, that is, a sense of what will happen after the workshop.

#### How is this done?

- Choose the scope, budget and desired outcome. Work with the team and the sponsors of the workshop (those who will benefit from the output or who are funding the project) to determine the theme for the workshop. Give the workshop a name that matches the aspiration. As part of this preliminary activity, determine your budget for this workshop. If you are using an external facilitator and/or if you are recruiting external participants, you will likely need to pay fees or honoraria.
- Plan the date and time, taking into account the pre-work you need to do to frame the
  workshop activities and outcomes and well as availability of participants. Give yourself
  enough time for proper planning and participant recruitment.









- Recruit participants. Select participants from a variety of backgrounds and organizations. Create a list of qualities and expertise you are hoping to bring in from the outside. You may include customers, partners, industry analysts, or technology experts. In fact, bringing in outsiders often adds excitement, energy, and fresh perspectives to your task and may actually help you discover a breakthrough. You will need to have written agreements with participants that cover ownership of output, confidentiality, and compensation.
- **Design the workshop**, including pre-work to be done before the meeting, preliminary "ice breaker" activity, presentations, and workshop exercises. Good workshop design includes opportunities for quieter individuals to get their points across and for people who think visually to collaborate with people who think analytically to create superior output. A workshop will also include warm-ups, "divergence" activities ("ideation" or opening up), "convergence" activities (selecting and shaping), and future planning.

## • Facilitate the workshop

Designate or hire an experienced facilitator to warm up the group, walk through the exercises, keep the group on task, and help stretch the group's thinking. If you have people from varying organizational levels at the workshop, it is a good idea to have an external facilitator to ensure that the senior-level participants do not dominate the conversations.

## • Plan the workshop follow-up actions

Designate who will be responsible to taking the workshop output to the next step. Often the output of a workshop will be a set of promising concepts that need to be shaped further, tested, explored, or expanded further.

- ✓ Spend extra time designing the workshop activities so that they will be as generative as possible.
- ✓ Make sure the facility and accommodations adequately support the workshop activities. Consider holding a workshop away from your usual place of business, if feasible.
- ✓ Hand-pick workshop participants for their expertise and their ability to work well in a team setting.
- Commit resources to follow up, and remain open to having workshop output be modified and changed during the subsequent phase.





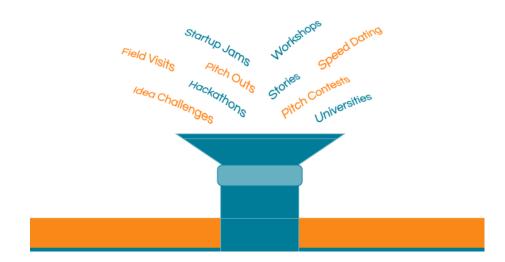




## IN CONCLUSION . . .

There are many other ways to fill your idea pipeline. A key to success with these or any other strategies is for you to keep an open mind and be willing to open your pipeline to new opportunities, both from within your organization and from the outside. All of this is easier said than done.

- 1. Get Honest. Truly understand where you want be and what is holding you back.
- 2. Figure out the best tool to help you get there.
- 3. Take action. Try something new. And keep at it.









Our IdeaWorks helps you find new opportunities to grow your business, make your employees happy, delight your customers, and save money. We offer these services:

- Collaborative Innovation Workshops align your teams to build new platforms for growth, learn new creativity techniques, tell great stories, communicate for impact, and co-innovate across departments and with external participants
- Customer Research gain unique and REAL insights from customers
- Innovation Strategy & Implementation plan and implement the best method for reaching into your organization and out to the global technology and innovation community to source new ideas or solutions to problems



## GET UNSTUCK. BE UNSTOPPABLE.

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