

INNOVATION MANAGEMENT SPECIAL

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## APPLICATIONS

**OUR  
IDEAWORKS  
ACCELERATING  
GROWTH  
WITH NEW  
OPPORTUNITIES**

IVY EISENBERG,  
FOUNDER AND CEO

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There is a big difference between interviewing a trucker on the phone and going out to a trucking show, trying out the new equipment and talking to the vendors and truckers

Ivy Eisenberg,  
Founder and CEO





# OUR IDEAWORKS

## ACCELERATING GROWTH WITH NEW OPPORTUNITIES

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BY AMITAV HALDIPUR

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**O**ur IdeaWorks is an innovation and lean customer research company. It works with organizations—large or mid-sized—and embeds itself in those organizations to help them get ‘unstuck’. The company focuses on working with cross-functional teams. Our IdeaWorks works at every level of the company’s hierarchy and brings external stakeholders, customers, and purchasers into its process to get a 360-degree view of the company’s organization.

Often, people do not have the appropriate tools that are required to do a good job and particularly, they do not spend enough time framing the problem. It is important for organizations to identify potential opportunities—using idea generation techniques. The lack of understanding the phases of the process and defining the problem as well as a lack of skills are just some of the issues that plague these organizations. “It helps to have an external facilitator to ensure that you are not shutting down ideas prematurely or only taking the ideas of the highest paid professional’s opinion (HiPPO),” says Ivy Eisenberg, founder, and CEO of Our IdeaWorks. As part of its portfolio of services, the company employs a process called creative problem solving—the origin of brainstorming. However, this process can be successful only after attaining insights from the company’s consumers, customers and any previous

research that has been conducted. Internal interviews with stakeholders and technology scans are also considered. Once completed, a focus group of 8-20 participants attends a workshop conducted by Our IdeaWorks to develop potential concepts for the company.

Eisenberg has been conducting innovation workshops with brain-storming and participatory designs for well over two decades. “I used to implement lead user research—user-driven innovation in the 90’s. I had a firm grounding on it and discovered that the creative education foundation and the creative problem-solving institute approach (an annual training session) used all the same techniques that I employed,” she explains. The lead user research team at Our IdeaWorks created its own processes, and as the creative problem-solving approach is a time-tested and time-honored set of materials, Eisenberg looks to implement it as part of Our IdeaWorks’ services wholly.

In a recent interview with Ivy Eisenberg, founder and CEO of Our IdeaWorks, we talk about how the company helps customers discover business opportunities, accelerate growth, and build successful products and services.

### **What are the challenges that customers face in the industry and how do you address them?**

Companies do not always go out and listen to customers or engage with them, afraid to ask questions. Firms do not understand that you need to understand potential customers and you need to be willing to be surprised before you have a product idea. Most companies do not have good listening techniques to properly observe and learn from what human beings are doing out there in the world. When organizations do look for insights, they might focus only on customer or consumer insights. They do not have a 360-degree view of what their own organization has a tolerance for, and many great ideas never go past the ideation stage because people have an unarticulated resistance internally. People may get stuck during the process of transforming a concept into a product in the pipeline. This is often because there is a lack of communication between the various parts of the organization.

The key differentiator of my business is that I go out and interact with customers throughout the entire life cycle—not only with actual customers but potential users. Everyone who works for me is very experienced but also humble. We are good listeners and we are not afraid to go a little beyond our job descriptions to pitch in and help make things happen in organizations we service—to help organizations be productive. All the consultants who work for me have the same attributes—they are not just single- focused.

### **Can you tell us about Our IdeaWorks and what the company does?**

We focus on working with cross-functional teams. We work across the internal organization and bring external stakeholders, customers, and purchasers into the process with us so that we get that 360-degree perspective of insight and that drives our work. One of our strengths is that we are not only an insights company—we help with the discovering and creating of innovation and we are experts in implementation as well. We have project management teams that work from the prototype stage through to implementation.

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THE DISCOVERY PROCESS IS  
GENERALLY A MONTH TO SIX WEEKS.  
THE ENGAGEMENT, INCLUDING  
IDEATION, CONCEPT BUILDING,  
ADDITIONAL CUSTOMER RESEARCH,  
AND IMPLEMENTATION PLANNING,  
IS ANOTHER SIX TO TWELVE WEEKS  
DEPENDING ON THE COMPANY’S  
RESOURCE COMMITMENT AND THE  
COMPLEXITY OF THE INITIATIVE.

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In terms of the insights and the research, we use a combination of standard qualitative and quantitative market research and ethnography interviews, as well as field visits. We combine this customer-driven innovation approach with creative problem solving and a lean approach. We have a creative way of finding people to co-innovate with companies. We help companies define who it is that they need to find, what it is they are asking, and what the best technique is. It might be observations, a one-on-one interview, or a partnership with someone.

I do not have a single technology stack at this point that I use. The discovery process is generally a month to six weeks. The engagement, including ideation, concept building,



additional customer research, and implementation planning, is another six to twelve weeks depending on the company's resource commitment and the complexity of the initiative. So the shortest engagement would be around 10-12 weeks, and the longest would be six to eight months. Actual implementation depends on the project. Our IdeaWorks also provides training or experiential workshops, which are two to three days. I always offer a booster session after the workshop to make sure that the enthusiasm generated during the workshop carries over to implementation and to surface any roadblocks that have cropped up.

sessions because that is how long they take to fill up their tanks. We stood outside at the gas pumps and did mini-interviews.

### **What does the future look like for Our IdeaWorks?**

I am hoping to create a workbook product and build a public workshop offering for smaller companies that do not have the resources for complete engagement. I



### **Can you provide a case study that highlights Our IdeaWorks' solution?**

We were doing a project with a major tire manufacturer to understand the world of the truck driver and what might be some of their emerging needs and potential opportunities for the tire manufacturer to provide solutions. We went to truck stops and interviewed truck drivers, and we went to trucking shows. There is a big difference between interviewing a trucker on the phone and going out to a trucking show, trying out the new equipment and talking to the vendors and truckers. We discovered that truckers do not linger at truck stops drinking coffee. The only time truckers stop is when they have to fill up fuel, so we cut up our research plan into 12-to-15 minute

want to expand beyond the New England area. Right now, my work is in the Northeastern US and Washington D.C. Working with projects that are in the technology arena is our sweet spot. Most companies have "innovation" either in the marketing division or in the R&D division. I span the gamut. I have begun work with process innovation and service innovation, using the same technique of bringing together users and stakeholders. Focusing on people is the key success factor. **CA**