

Brainstorming with Props - "Goodie Bags" and The WSJ

By Bobette Kyle

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<http://WebSiteMarketingPlan.com/Arts/BrainstormingWallStreetJournal.htm>

When developing new strategies or products, coming up with unique ideas is often a struggle. It is one of the reasons why, in any industry, there is so much repetition. One way to generate new ideas and "get the creative juices flowing" is by brainstorming using props. There are several ways to incorporate props into a session. Two of my favorites are the Wall Street Journal (WSJ) and goodie bags.

* What is Brainstorming? *

According to dictionary.com, brainstorming is:

- 1) A method of shared problem solving in which all members of a group spontaneously contribute ideas or
- 2) A similar process undertaken by a person to solve a problem by rapidly generating a variety of possible solutions.

In action, brainstorming should be uncensored - no idea is dumb or impossible. In an organization, throw titles out the window. The janitor's ideas have the same validity as the CEO's. When brainstorming, try to pretend you know nothing about what can and cannot be done. Write down ideas as they come up, no matter how outlandish. The task at hand is to free-associate, generating as many ideas as possible.

* Brainstorming with "Goodie Bags" *

There's nothing more boring than a sterile conference room. Yet, this is where many group sessions take place. To liven the atmosphere, you need a springboard...stimuli to get the ideas flowing.

One way to provide stimuli is to gather miscellaneous items into "goodie bags" and have group members sort through them, writing down ideas as they come up. When I worked as the seasonal Marketing Manager for Nestlé's Sunmark Division, I used this technique to hold a very productive Easter brainstorm session. I filled the bags with small items I thought may stimulate ideas because of their texture, taste, appearance, ingredients, sound, or smell.

In the meeting, I divided the team into sub-groups of three to four people and gave each a bag. After going through the bags, discussing, and writing down ideas, each group gave a small presentation. We came out of the meeting with many more great ideas than we could implement that

year - and it was fun!

Goodie bags can also be used to generate ideas for new online product and services as well as for new marketing strategies.

* Brainstorming with The WSJ *

If you do not have a group to work with, try using a business newspaper as a springboard for generating ideas. The Wall Street Journal (Both WSJ Online and the offline newspaper.) is great for brainstorming for several reasons:

- It always contains articles about several industries (Good for coming up with ways to apply new approaches to your own industry.).
- The paper has a regular e-commerce section.
- There is a daily marketing section.
- The editors include a mix of short articles (Good for generating ideas based on what others are doing.) and in-depth reports (Good for ideas that grow from trends.).
- All the articles relate in some way to business, but are not strictly news reporting. There are human interest and analytical pieces as well.

Additionally, The Wall Street Journal has done an excellent job of integrating the Internet into a traditional business model. Besides offering both online and offline newspaper versions, there are several email alert services. Because they have successfully integrated online marketing into their own business, WSJ writers and editors are able to intelligently address both online and offline activities.

OK, let us do some quick exercises using The Wall Street Journal. I have both an online subscription (with access to 30-day archives) and a print newspaper subscription, so I will skim some articles...

* Here's one (9/17/02, newspaper front page and WSJ online) - WorldCom Lawyers are advertising in the white pages.

What about your company?...advertising in white pages...give your products their own phone numbers...advertise the numbers elsewhere...personalities for your brands/services...mascots...root beer...separate sites for each...etc.

Remember, *do not* censor - just play one idea off another and write down *everything* that comes to mind. It doesn't matter if it is sensible or even relevant - just make sure you write down enough clues so later you know what you were thinking.

* Here's another one (9/16/02 newspaper front page) - Snoop Doggy Dog is reinventing himself.

It seems he has a new sound, new album, etc., etc. I also think I remember he has done some acting in the past. In order to keep the "Snoop Doggy Dog" brand fresh, he expands into other categories. But notice he is still in the "entertainment" industry - not venturing into industries that are not a fit with his image. You can use this approach as a springboard for your own business. Think of ways to expand into other categories - to reinvent - while staying in your same general area of expertise.

* Here's a third (9/23/02 WSJ online special report): According to a Harris Interactive Poll, more Americans want to live in California than any other state.

For the first time in five years, Florida is *not* number 1. Hmm...a changing American mind set? The springboard here is to think of ways to apply this "California Dreamin'" to your strategies and/or products.

More potential springboards from the 9/23/02 Website homepage: Salomon Smith Barney gets fined \$5 million for issuing misleading research...Pepsi's looking at healthy snacks...customers distrust e-commerce sites...you get the idea.

Whether brainstorming alone or in a group, remember two rules - 1) no censoring and 2) use props as springboards for new ideas. Do this and your brainstorming session is sure to be a success.

* Resource *

The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) at times offers subscription discounts. Check for current offers at: <http://WebSiteMarketingPlan.com/Free/WSJ2WeeksFree.htm>

* About the Author *

Bobette Kyle is author of the marketing plan guide "How Much for Just the Spider? Strategic Web Site Marketing". Table of contents and excerpt here: <http://WebSiteMarketingPlan.com/BookExcerpt.htm>

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