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Brainstorming with Props – "Goodie Bags" and The WSJ

By Bobette Kyle

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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.

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What is Brainstorming?  
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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.

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Brainstorming with "Goodie Bags"

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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.

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### Brainstorming with The WSJ

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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* #1.
Hmmm...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.

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Resource

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The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) at times offers subscription discounts. Check for current offers at:

here

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Learning The Tricks: Buy Or Make Your Props

By Preston Houer

Magic is such an illusive matter that people tend to believe that something extraordinary can really happen. In most cases, magicians will create illusions in order to divert the people's attention from reality to pure fantasy. It is when people disappear; bodies can float in mid-air, etc.

That is why every magician knows that whatever he does in front of the audience, he is actually making people entertained and amused.

What most people do not know is that the magic tricks that magicians perform are not purely skills.

Their props contribute to their success as well. This is because magicians can never perform their tricks without their props.

As they say, props can make or unmake a magician. Defective props, and not just improper coordination of skills, may contribute to the failure of the show. Hence, it is important to know how to buy or make the right stuff in order to perform their best.

Here is a list of some tips that you can use when buying or making your own props:

1. Know your tricks

The problem with most magicians is that they are not well versed on their tricks. That is why they do not know what type of props is appropriate for a particular trick.

For this reason, it is extremely important for the magician to familiarize himself with the kind of tricks that he will perform so that he will know what to props to buy or make.

2. Never buy trick coins or cards.

This will only create an impression on your audience that there might be something special on the coins or cards that you cannot use a normal item.

Hence, even if props are important in generating a successful show, it is best not to purely rely on them. It would be better if you will use the normal coins or cards and practice your tricks.

It really pays to practice a lot than to execute your tricks at once but the show is entirely dependent on the props.

3. Well maintained props generate more money

Keep in mind that it is important for every magician to maintain his props. It does not matter whether you have bought the props or you have just made them yourself. What matter most is how you try to preserve its efficiency by maintaining its color, vibrancy, beauty, and quality.

Remember that taking your props for granted and using defective props may ruin your career.

4. Keep them away from any harmful products

In order to maintain the goodness and quality of your props, it would be better if you will keep in them in places where they are away from dust, moisture, and dirt.

Making them last longer will definitely bring you more benefits and will keep you from buying and making props repeatedly.

5. Test or inspect the product before you leave the store

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If you will be buying your props from a magic store or any novelty store for that matter, try to inspect meticulously the overall composition of the item.

Check for broken parts or loose portions. This may ruin your act once you are using them in your show.

6. Go for the best items; look for the magician's props

If you really want to obtain the best quality when it comes to props, it would be better if you consider the props of a professional or well-known magician. These products are known to be of high quality considering the fact that they were endorsed by a famous magician who can attest its efficiency.

These props are considered as those that have been tried and tested.

7. Go for the bundle

If you are just a budding magician, it is best if you will not spend too much just buying props. Either you could make your own or you could go for bundles. This means that you can save more money if you will buy props that are included in a package.

For instance, you could get a sales package wherein the box that was used could also be utilized as a table during the show or performance.

Boiled down, buying or making props is relatively important to the success of a specific performance. Hence, you should be very particular when choosing the best props to use.

Preston Houer has been involved with the art of illusion and sleight of hand for over 30 years. Let Preston show you how to Have Fun With Magic. Visit His Site Today!

<http://www.have-fun-with-magic.com>



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