

Product Innovation - How To Have Ideas

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Monday, 02 March 2009

Product innovation starts with ideas, which anyone can generate by asking a few simple questions.
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The easiest route to creative product innovation is to start with something we already have and ask some simple questions about it to suggest new ideas. For the sake of demonstrating how this can be done, we'll suppose that we want to design a new kind of bicycle.

{bot_wrgoogle}We start by asking a lot of questions about the existing product. Along with each of these questions, we ask "What new ideas or possibilities does this suggest?" The following are some of the questions you might start with.

What complaints do people have about this product?

Complaints or "problems" are a great place to start looking for innovation opportunities. In the case of a bicycle, people might complain about the uncomfortable seats, for example, which leads to all sorts of ideas about how to make them better. Maybe buyers could sit on a substance that takes an impression of their bottom, in order to build seats to fit the individual.

What else could be added to this?

What possibilities does this suggest? A "pet carrier" in front of the handle bars comes to mind, with a strap to hold in your cat or small dog. A GPS unit for bicycles is another possibility. A "roof" to keep the rain off of you might work.

Why do people buy this?

Product innovation often comes from asking why people use an existing product, and considering different and possibly better ways to meet that same need or desire. In this case we can guess that people buy bicycles for transportation, to get exercise and, in the case of mountain bikes, for adventure. We can consider each of these motivations in looking for new ideas.

"Transportation" make me think about other forms, like trains, and this immediately brings to mind the idea of a bicycle of sorts that travels on rails very fast from city to city by pedal power alone. "Exercise" suggests looking beyond stationary bikes and regular bicycling that is limited by season. How about an indoor track that has turns and hills and is designed to make winter biking possible and interesting? Adventure biking suggests speed to me (among other things), and makes me wonder if a spring system, wound by the riders pedaling, could be used for a sudden burst of speed.

What are the various limits involved, and how can they be changed?

A bicycle typically is limited to one or sometimes two people, but what if it could hold twenty? This question suggests a pedal-powered bus that a group of people could travel in. Price is another limit if you want to sell bicycles. Weight is other limiting factor. There is definitely a market for lightweight bicycles. At the moment light materials are the usual solution, but what about making everything smaller? This also makes the bike easier to store.

There are other questions you can ask to suggest new ideas. "How can I make this cheaper?" for example, is a question that could help almost any new product design be more marketable. "What else do buyers of this item want?" is another good one. And by the way, whether they are good or not, all the ideas above came to me from the questions asked and during the twenty minutes it took to write this. Generating ideas for product innovation is relatively easy once you practice with a few good techniques, like the questioning method outlined here.

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