

MIND MAPPING (SPIDER WEB)

Mind mapping is a visual tool for enhancing the brainstorming process. In essence, you're drawing a picture of the relationships among and between ideas.

Start by writing down your goal or challenge in the center of a large paper or white board, and on your own (or when mapping with a team - ask participants to) think of related issues. You might create a second layer of all the services your team offers to that specific client. Layer by layer, add content to your map so that you can visually see how to solve a problem or visualize all possible tactics.

STARBURSTING

Create a six-pointed star. At the center of the star, write the challenge or opportunity you're facing. At each point of the star, write one of the following words: who, what, where, when, why, and how. Use these words to generate questions. Who are our happiest clients? What do our clients say they want? Use the questions to generate discussion to your map so that you can visually see how to solve a problem or visualize all possible tactics.

REVERSE BRAINSTORMING

Ordinary brainstorming asks participants to solve problems. Reverse brainstorming asks participants to come up with great ways to cause a problem. Start with the problem and ask "how could we cause this?" Be sure to remind your team that the sky is the limit and no one's ideas should be shot down because they seem too off the wall or impossible. Once you have a list of great ways to create problems, you're ready to start solving them.

CHARRETTE

Imagine a brainstorming session in which 35 people from six different departments are all struggling to come up with viable ideas. The process is time consuming, boring, and—all too often—unfruitful. The Charrette method breaks up the problem into smaller chunks, with small groups discussing each element of the problem for a set period of time. Once each group has discussed one issue, their ideas are passed on to the next group who builds on them. By the end of the Charrette, each idea may have been discussed five or six times—and the ideas discussed have been refined.

GAP FILLING

Start with a statement of where you are. Then write a statement of where you'd like to be. How can you fill in the gap to get to your goal? Your participants will respond with a wide range of answers from the general to the particular. Collect them all, and then organize them to develop a vision for action.



DRIVERS ANALYSIS

Work with your group to discover the drivers behind the problem you're addressing. What's driving client loyalty down? What's driving the competition? What's driving a trend toward lower productivity? As you uncover the drivers, you begin to catch a glimpse of possible solutions.

SWOT ANALYSIS

We use SWOT Analysis when we are creating client DES docs, but you can use it for day to day brainstorming as well. SWOT Analysis identifies strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Usually, it's used to decide whether a potential project or campaign is worth undertaking. In brainstorming, it's used to stimulate collaborative analysis. What are our real strengths? Do we have weaknesses that we rarely discuss?

SLIP WRITING

The brain writing process involves having each participant anonymously write down ideas on index cards. The ideas can then be randomly distributed out to other participants who add to or critique the ideas. You can also have participants write their idea on a card then have everyone pass their cards to the left, have the next person add to their idea, and keep passing and adding until the card gets all the way around the circle. This approach is also called "Crawford Slip Writing," as the basic concept was invented in the 1920's by a professor named Crawford.

COLLABORATIVE BRAINWRITING

Write your question or concern on a large piece of paper and post it in a public place. Ask team members to write or post their ideas when they are able, over the course of a week. Collate ideas on your own or with your group's involvement.

REVERSE THINKING

This creative approach asks, "what would someone else do in our situation?" Then imagine doing the opposite. Would it work? Why or why not? Does the "usual" approach really work well, or are there better options?

STEP LADDER BRAINSTORMING

Start by sharing the brainstorming challenge with everyone in the room. Then send everyone out of the room to think about the challenge—except two people.

Allow the two people in the room to come up with ideas for a short period of time, and then allow just one more person to enter the room. Ask the new person to share their ideas with the first two before discussing the ideas already generated.

After a few minutes ask another person to come in, and then another. In the long run, everyone will be back in the room—and everyone will have had a chance to share his or her ideas with colleagues.

ROUND ROBIN BRAINSTORMING

A “round robin” is a game in which everyone gets a chance to participate. In the case of brainstorming that means everyone (1) must share an idea and (2) wait until everyone else has shared before suggesting a second idea or critiquing ideas. This is a great way to encourage shy (or uninterested) individuals to speak up while keeping dominant personalities from taking over the brainstorming session. Another variation of this is to have everyone stand in a circle and pass a ball around and when someone catches the ball they have to share an idea or solution to the challenge.

THE FIVE WHYS

Another tool that’s often used outside of brainstorming, the Five Whys can also be effective for getting thought processes moving forward. Simply start with a problem you’re addressing and ask “why is this happening?” Once you have some answers, ask “why does this happen?” Continue the process five times (or more), digging deeper each time until you’ve come to the root of the issue.

RAPID IDEATION

Ask the individuals in your group to write down as many ideas as they can in a given period of time. Set a timer and let them write. Then either have them share the ideas aloud or collect responses. Often, you’ll find certain ideas popping up over and over again; in some cases, these are the obvious ideas, but in some cases they may provide some revelations.

TRIGGER STORMING

This variant on the round robin approach starts with a “trigger” to help people come up with thoughts and ideas. Possible triggers include open ended sentences or provocative statements. For example, “Client issues always seem to come up when ____,” or “The best way to solve client problems is to pass the problem along to someone else.”

STORYBOARDING

If you’re trying to design a process or path to purchase, storyboarding can help you see where your understanding of a problem supports or conflicts with a proposed solution, and where more thought/research is needed. By developing a visual story to explore the problem at hand as a narrative, your team will be able to see how ideas interact and connect to form a solution.

Take a few minutes to have everyone on the team write out their ideas as individual sticky notes. These don’t have to be complete thoughts -- physically pinning up quotes, pictures, user info, and the like can help you see new relationships between different components.

Once you have a group of sticky notes to work from, start arranging them on the board as a progression: first this, then that. Organizing your ideas as a continuous series will help you see new connections and eliminate extraneous material that doesn’t support your end goal.

BRAIN-WRITING

This is similar to slip writing, but gives participants more space for fleshing out ideas. Write the problem you are trying to solve at the top of a paper. Have participants simply write down a few rough ideas for solving the problem on the paper. Each piece of paper is then passed on to someone else, who reads it silently and adds their own ideas to the page. This process is repeated until everyone has had a chance to add to each original piece of paper. The notes can then be gathered, ready for discussion.

The big advantage of brain-writing is that it makes sure everybody is given the opportunity to have their thoughts and ideas thoroughly considered by the group. This avoids the loudest or most extroverted people unintentionally dominating the sessions.

ZERO DRAFT

The Zero Draft is an ideation technique for individuals often used by writers and is essentially a form of focused free-writing. For marketers, it can help focus the first stages of a new project by establishing what you currently know and getting your initial ideas out of your brain and onto paper.

Taking your central theme or topic:

1. Write down everything you currently know about the subject.
2. Write down what you need or want to know about the subject, but don't currently know.
3. Reflect on why the subject is important.
4. Add anything else that takes your fancy -- this is a chance to get whatever's floating around in your head out into the world.

The Zero Draft method is all about getting everything you can think of relating to your topic down on paper, so don't be concerned if it looks messy and unfocused. The goal is just to get past the initial block that often plagues creative professionals in the early stages of a new project.

ALTER-EGOS / HEROES

In this activity small groups imagine how they would go about solving a given problem if their team were led by a famous character, fictional or real. How would Cat Woman go about positioning your brand as a thought leader in virtual reality? What would Steve Jobs do to improve your latest communications package? How would Don Draper get your core messages across to millennials?

You can either chose someone you think embodies the right qualities for the job to help develop your vision, or someone at the opposite end of that scale, to explore less conventional ideas.

S.C.A.M.P.E.R.

S.C.A.M.P.E.R. is a process for expanding and improving upon ideas by testing and questioning them from different angles. For each letter of the mnemonic, ask yourself a related question about your project or the problem at hand:

- Substitute, e.g.: What would happen to the project if we swapped X for Y?
- Combine, e.g.: What would happen to the project if we combined X and Y?
- Adapt, e.g.: What changes would need to be made to adapt this project to a different context?
- Modify, e.g.: What could we modify to create more value on this project?
- Put to another use, e.g.: What other uses or applications might this project have?
- Eliminate, e.g.: What could we remove from the project to simplify it?
- Reverse, e.g.: How could we reorganize this project to make it more effective?

This method forces you to approach your project or problem in unexpected ways. Each question asks you to dig a little deeper into the issue and consider new possibilities.

C-SKETCHING

The C-Sketch method of concept development requires team members to draw sketches of possible design solutions. Subsequent rounds are used to add to each sketch in attempts to create a progressive sketch. Pass out paper and pens and give them a minute to sketch out a solution, and then every couple of minutes that sketch is passed to a different team member. This is done until each drawing has made it to each team member. The ideas that are fostered in this stage will be used to drive the final design, concept or idea.