



A product development company

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Beyond the Center Why Brainstorming Is Essential to New Product Development

By Michael Verdone

The center point of product development is easily described. It is safe. It does not “push the envelope” or encourage anyone to think out of the box more than necessary to get the job done. Working the center automatically rules out unknown solutions, possibly resulting in a loss in the market when competitors may be developing the next big thing. And above all, it precipitates “status quo” product development. Sometimes, however, getting beyond the center can be a challenge for even the best design team. That challenge can often be overcome with product brainstorming, encouraging a design team or client to dig deeper into their ideas, by investigating categories, applications, features and over all designs.

Looking down from 30,000 feet

Brainstorming activities begin by looking at a product from a 30,000 foot view. Without stopping at the expected function, application and market, the team can use brainstorming to consider what is next. With good brainstorming, there are no bad ideas and at this point pretty much anything goes, there is no limit. Simply by asking a series of questions, one idea leads to the next which inspires the next and so on. A brief look at unrelated industries and trends can also add a new dimension to brainstorming activities. This exercise reveals the ideas that are inside of us all, but are lost in the day to day detail of new product development. Brainstorming sessions of this nature can often end with hundreds of new concepts, features, functions, applications and markets, which leads to stronger ideas, better products and future product development opportunities.



Narrowing the Scope

Like children on the first day of summer, blue sky brainstorming is exhilarating. It gives the team a chance to leave behind the detail and focus for a few hours, in exchange for unending “what ifs”. But, narrowing the scope is also an exciting adventure. By selecting a few ideas from the original session, the focus becomes more about discovering which ideas are viable now versus five years from now. Other discussions include which ideas are the most marketable, what problems each solve and gaining a clearer direction, which leads to the design exploration phase.





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Design Exploration



While designers find brainstorming fun and exciting, exploration is their passion. Think of it like a treasure hunter. They know there is a diamond waiting to be found, it is their job to uncover it. While finding the diamond is rewarding, the hunt or exploration is the thrill. After narrowing the scope from what might have been a hundred ideas into five or ten concepts, this step encourages the exploration of each in more detail. This results in numerous quick sketches that can be used in market research to further narrow the scope and provide solid direction for the final product.

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Getting Beyond the Center

Getting beyond the center with brainstorming and design exploration sure sounds like a lot of fun, and it is. But don't let the fun and excitement fool your team into thinking it is just a fun activity that can be overlooked or underutilized to save money or time on a project. Going beyond the center, pushing through status quo and mediocrity is the best way to ensure new product success. Product development teams and clients use these essential brainstorming and design exploration tools to create ground breaking, dynamic products, identify solutions, develop intellectual property and focus on a clear path to success. So now it's up to you. Will you challenge your team to push harder and move beyond the center to create great products or is status quo product development enough?