

Lisa Baxter, Consultant
Marketing Campaigns – a creativity workshop

Lisa Baxter is a consultant, trainer and author specialising in 'qualitative consultancy'. She helps arts and cultural organisations think smarter, plan insightfully and evaluate robustly using a combination of co-creational workshops, creative consultation events and qualitative research. Lisa is currently working with the soon-to-open National Football Museum (Manchester) to conceive, shape and articulate its 'experience offer' and brand identity. Other 'qualitative' clients include: Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, Lyric Theatre (Hammersmith), Northern Ballet Theatre, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art and the West Yorkshire Playhouse. A member of the Association of Qualitative Research and Associate Member of the Market Research Society, Lisa has recently launched two in-house Audience Insight Training packages on Focus Groups and Qualitative Observational Research. Each offers an immersive one-day training session with 12 months follow-up support and mentoring. www.lisa-baxter.co.uk

In this interactive workshop delegates were introduced to creative idea generation techniques to help them to improve the process of devising communication campaigns. The workshop took place twice. This report is from the first.

Thinking

This is not a session in which I will teach you how to produce better marketing campaigns. I do not have the solutions, you do.

We are going to explore some of the unproductive thinking traps in the workplace or even in our private lives. We will look at ways we can exercise our creative side, then we will look at some of the challenges we face and do some ideas generation to deal with them. The key thing in this session is to experience. It's an experiential workshop. So, if you are taking notes, write down what occurs to you, not what I say.

To begin with, spend 30 seconds drawing an alien.

Put your hand up if your alien has legs ... head ... nose ... *[most had]*

We have pre-existing ideas of what an alien might look like – we usually draw them to look a bit like us – within existing paradigms.

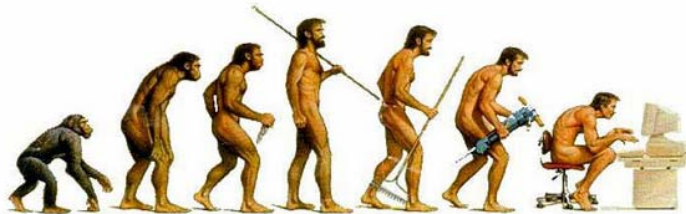
This was biological, but the same could be true of cultural, technical, social or organisational assumptions. This is what can give rise to unproductive thinking because we are working exclusively within existing paradigms. Here are some examples:

Patterned thinking

Doing things because they have always been done that way. This could relate to systems and processes, how decisions are made and how campaigns are planned. It isn't necessarily bad, it can make some processes easier, but when you go onto automatic pilot you stop thinking and operate according to the pattern. Think about your own organisations and their processes – how far are these done because they are always done?

Incremental Thinking

Taking a short series of steps that continually adapt to the environment. Adapting is good; you refine, adapt, improve efficiencies but it's dependent on the environment so you are constantly reacting to the business environment instead of raising the game. You're always one step behind. You can get overtaken by events, trends etc.



Satisficing

When good is good enough. If it's not broken don't fix it. This is not how successful companies like Google or Apple operate. Is there anything about your campaigns which are adequate but nothing more? Are you pushing yourself to achieve?

Reactive thinking

You become fixated on dealing with the symptoms of the problem meaning you lose sight of the bigger picture. For example, dealing with declining audiences by increasing your marketing materials rather than examining the underlying causes such as trends, competitive contexts and organisational issues.

Do you have experience of any of these four types of thinking?

It's very difficult to deal with them. It begins with acknowledging that they are happening. So what issues are there within your organisations, especially relating to campaign creation?

The issues which delegates contributed included

- Knowing that you won't get approval for your ideas from higher up and therefore you don't put them forward. *LB – think about why those further up the chain don't want to take your ideas – what is it that's limiting them?*
- Budgets
- Time
- Small teams
- Fear
- The order in which we do things. Formulaic approaches.
- The things which touring companies always expect receiving venues to do, not being open to new ways of doing things which might be more effective.
- Taking time to research the audience

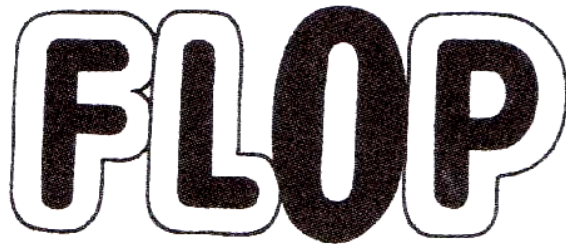
Which problem would you like to work on?

The group chose time and related issues – taking time to research the audience.

Top tips on developing our creativity

What does this say?

Delegates started off by saying 'flop' before deciding it could also say 'flip'.



We need to deprogramme ourselves because we are all creative. Let's try looking at our problems from a different perspective. New stuff will occur to you.

Defer judgement – there will always be someone to stop peoples' ideas – and it may be another part of your own judgement like having your foot on both the accelerator and the brake. Never step on people's ideas. They are just ideas – risk free. If you don't give yourself chance to develop the ideas in the first place you will never get anywhere.

Delegates were asked to pair up.

Person A had to come up with ideas for the best party ever

Person B had to be the 'yes but' person who would argue why it's not possible.

During the second part of the exercise, Person B was to come up with ideas and Person A to be a 'yes and' person, building on the ideas of the other person.

How did it feel being 'yes butted'?

You became increasingly desperate

Stifled

Frustration

How often do we do this to other people?

How did it feel being 'yes anded'?

*It made us push the idea further
Confidence building
Like a conversation*

What's the party going to be like? *Amazing!*

Ideas are risk free. Create an environment that will help you produce ideas.

So, try and separate the right and left parts of your brain. Separate the creative from the critical side of your thinking. Creative thinking is divergent, critical thinking is convergent. You may want to be divergent first and evaluate later. Throw everything in the air first and then decide which ones you want to collect up and use. Then wrap those up into a plan.

The essence of innovation is being able to put ideas together – familiar ideas with new ones – ensuring that they are implementable.

Creative thinking ground rules

- Believe in yourself. If you think the idea, say the idea. There's always an underlying reason – your idea might even come from somewhere subconscious. If necessary, put all the silly ideas up separately.
- Be positive. You can't generate ideas with a negative mind set.
- Suspend judgment. No buts – it could be about more than the language, it could be the looks you give, the body language etc.
- Seek wild and unusual ideas.
- Aim for quantity, not quality. Don't hold back your ideas, filtering them yourself, let them out – give them flight. Evaluate them later.
- Go for more, different new. Keep changing your perspective.
- Build on each other's ideas. You're a team – own the ideas collectively.

Now I am going to give you 60 seconds to look at this object and decide what it is



How many ideas did you come up with? More than 5, 10,12?

Most people had between 5 and 10.

The first ideas are always the most obvious. They tend to come from your memory and they are things you know. But we need to flush these away to make room for the new ones. So we need to create space and time to take us through the pain threshold.

The difference between brain storming and brain drizzling is that when we brain drizzle we satisfice and don't go through the pain threshold.

Delegates were given another 60 seconds to come up with more ideas (about the same picture). The majority of delegates had more than 5 ideas with some having come up with 10.

Campaign planning

In what ways might we ...

- ... maximise the PR potential of this event?
- ... make opera irresistible?
- ... grab the attention of new students to the town?
- ... lever the local appeal of this exhibition?
- ... harness the goodwill of our audiences?

These are the sort of questions we might have when looking at campaign planning.

The next step involves us re-formulating the question into a more positive question to answer. So, let's take our chosen problem statement and turn it into a positive question.

Our original problem was the issue of time and formulaic thinking. What question shall we turn it into?

Several suggestions were put forward with the 'in what ways might we ...' , and the one that was collectively chosen / adapted was:

In what ways might we use our time better (within the context of campaign planning)?

Delegates were given post-its and pens and asked to put down one thought per post-its in clear ways, not just with a one-word answer. Answers were put forward for display including:

Get in earlier when the office is quiet
Plan and prioritise
Make a plan at the beginning of the day
Be more focused

Write a clear plan with a timeline
Focus on what's important
Set aside time to think of new ideas
Mini-deadlines

Forward planning longer view	Compare each others' schedules
Create a proper plan before you go and do the task	
Do one thing at one time	Casual catch-up
Plan ahead	Work a different time together
Fewer meetings	Less chat more action
Think about what we're doing properly	Do the most urgent task first
Don't answer the phone for half a day	Talk to each other about problems
Don't turn the computer on for the first hour	Write a list
Limit meeting lengths	Set aside time to focus
Switch off phones for an hour	Schedule planning meetings
Share each campaign with the team	Share workload
Talk with colleagues to coordinate tasks	Communicate often
Think whether templates we use still work	Pick a specific time of day
Plan as a team	Be confident in your judgements
We need to communicate and not be afraid to suggest	
Turn off emails when campaign planning	Learn to say no to things Analyse
previous audiences and data	Make a list of the challenges
Don't set time limits on ideas	Be practical with plans
Don't just make lists do	Create a system for sharing ideas easily
Leave meetings with actions and deadlines	Realistic objectives
Start making lists of ideas when you get in rather than checking emails	
Work together within a team	Write ideas down when you've had them
Remove distractions	Don't be glued to the desk
Ask people who are not normally involved to contribute suggestions	
Have more meetings to discuss challenges	Pick up phone don't wait for emails
Take a realistic approach to the time tasks take	
Get out of the office with colleagues	Make office quite time
Don't have campaign planning meetings in the office	
Use less post-it notes	Extra help from outside
Work in an inspiring environment	Have a space in which to be creative
Go for a team walk and talk	Have a proper break to recharge brain
Timetable quiet times for brainstorming	Timetable noisy times for brainstorming
Accept help from others	
Include other departments in idea generation	

Now we are going to go beyond our comfort zones. Which ideas out of all of these most inspire you? How can you build on it with more ideas? Remember to suspend judgement, be brave, be wild. If you're stuck take two ideas and put them together to see what you get.

These were some of the ideas put forward

Have ideas boards

Outsource

Test ideas using social media followers	Record ideas
Great idea boards with colour	Find an unusual place to have a meeting
Get outsiders to write our schedules	Have different music on every day
Talk face to face with those we're targeting	Get local students to contribute ideas
Embrace young peoples' ideas	Bring in sugar high staff
Discuss your challenges with people in other industries	
Move away from desk and seat	Make work creative
Bring in people from other departments	Be more creative in meetings
Bring in examples of ideas you love	Online ideas forum
Avoid working late and taking work home	Use what is available
Schedule time for emailing	Goodbye schedules
Share workload and allocate tasks	Build on strengths
Have lunch in the café and talk to customers	
Meet in the café once a week at 9am to share ideas	
Involve more than one department in idea generation	
Move on to something else if you are not getting anywhere with what you're doing	
Use groups to test ideas and feedback	Use staff meetings to fish for ideas
Go to a new place each week for your meetings and ask someone new each time	
Adopt a flexible approach to running your campaigns	
Adapt to ideas that are better	Find ways to say yes
Think like a child	Have an ideas day
Personalise a space in the office	Awayday together
Vary times of meetings. People are creative at different times of the day	
Think of a place which your audience uses and see it through their eyes	
Fewer meetings with cakes	Group trips out for new experiences
Meet casual staff who don't normally have an input into ideas	
Create a more inspiring office space	Books, music dvds slot
Trips to inspiring places	Take risks and review as you go
Ask public to review work	Get out of the office when planning
Walk a different way to work	Visit other venues for inspiration
Tell people one positive thing they've done	Don't let others give you new tasks
Test ideas in focus group	Swap desks for the day
Use wiki sites to share ideas	Allow things to fail
Set up an email address for spur of the moment ideas.	
Be playful.	

We've gone beyond the threshold!

But what are we going to do with these ideas?

The group was split into two and was asked to theme and cluster the ideas and to give the theme a title that is a solution.

The clusters that had emerged included:

- Creative atmosphere in the office
- Going to other places, spaces etc
- Collaboration with others – departments etc
- Focusing around the issues and excluding irrelevance
- Sharing ideas within the team and across departments

[the recording was not able to pick up everyone’s ideas – this was only a sample]

Delegates were then asked to rank their favourite themes and ideas with the use of stickers

The ideas around creative atmosphere in the office ranked higher than some of the ideas such as creating lists although most ideas had some supporters.

Then the best ideas would be ‘ramped up’ in order to create a campaign plan.

Positives	Potentials
Concerns	Overcomes

So we take one idea – *get out of the office* – and in positives you write down what you like about the idea. In potentials you stretch the idea – moving it beyond. Then the concerns – what are the problems with this idea? And finally, how can we then overcome these concerns?

Positives included:

No distractions. Inspiring. Exciting. Clear your head. Different perspectives. Fresh air. Breaks the pattern.

Potential:

Getting out and meeting new people. Seeing potential marketing opportunities.
Different ideas.

Concerns:

You'll never come back. Cost involved. Time it takes to go somewhere. Getting everyone to come with you.

Overcomes

Umbrellas. Take a laptop with you. Schedule the time so you become used to it. Make it a treat. Trial it. Select a strategic place that has added value.

So, in summing up, what we've done:

- Recognised unproductive thinking habits
- Developed potential ways of addressing them
- Top tips for creative thinking
- Experience of simple creative thinking
- Potential to apply within a campaign planning framework
- How might you apply what you've learnt?
- What are the key issues you face?
- What could you do about them?