



Patrick Beaudouin

Brainstorming

Brainstorming conjures tons of ideas all at once. A brainstorm is a distinct segment of time when you amp up the generative part of your brain and turn down the evaluative part. The intention is to leverage the collective thinking of the group. Brainstorming can be used throughout the design process: to plan empathy work, to assess products and services, and to come up with design solutions.



How to brainstorm:

Your team's sole goal is to generate as many ideas as possible, without judgment. Gather in front of a whiteboard and spend 15 to 30 minutes in high engagement "brainstorm mode."

Be sure to capture every idea, regardless of your feelings about them. You can either assign a scribe to capture ideas as they're called out or go all-in, each person shares their ideas out loud and puts them on the board themselves. Either way, use post-its and stick them up quickly.

You can use How Might We questions to launch a brainstorm (see card #13). "How might we give each shopper a personal checkout experience?"





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Facilitate a brainstorm

Good facilitation is key to a generative brainstorm. Brainstorming spawns many, wide-ranging (and sometimes left field) ideas. A good facilitator sets the stage for open, active, and constructive engagement.



How to facilitate a brainstorm:

Energy.

As facilitator, it's your task to keep ideas flowing. Be sure to write a compelling question to kick off the brainstorm. If the team slows or gets stuck, add a variation to the prompt to shake things up (prepare options ahead of time).

Constraints.

Add solution constraints to spark new ideas. "What if it had to be round?" "How would superman do it?" Or create process constraints, such as shooting for 50 ideas in 20 minutes.

Space.

Be mindful of where you brainstorm. Find a room with lots of vertical work space. Make sure all participants are standing and have supplies in hand—post-its and a sharpie.





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Brainstorm selection

Your brainstorm should generate many, wide-ranging ideas. That's the easy part. The hard part is selecting which ideas to act on. Brainstorm selection may be straight forward for some brainstorms (simply pick a few standout ideas), but selecting design solutions may take more deliberation.

Don't pick just one and don't settle on safe choices. Select a range of ideas to carry forward into prototyping, aiming to preserve the breadth of solutions generated by the group.



How to select brainstorm ideas:

Don't narrow down ideas too fast. An implausible idea may spark a useful or meaningful insight. Hang onto ideas that excite, amuse, or intrigue the team. Consider these three selection techniques.

Post-it voting.

Each team member gets three votes. The post-its with the most marks get selected.

Four categories.

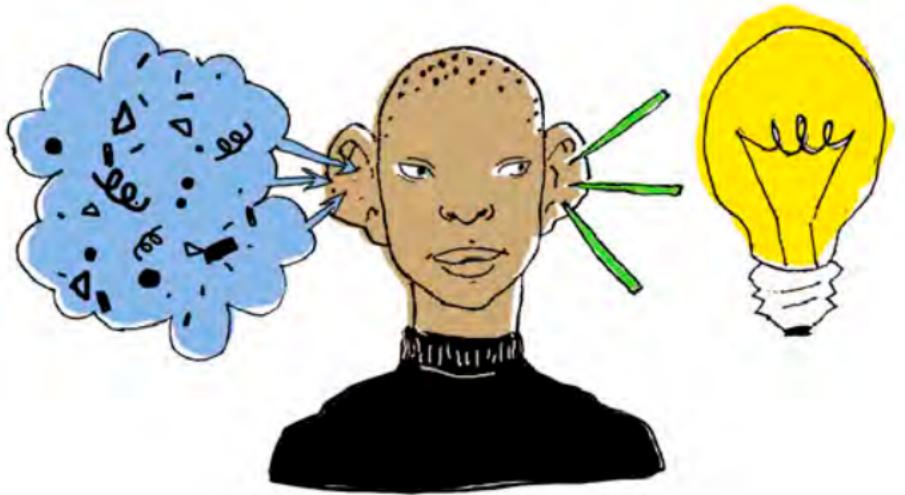
Elect one or two ideas within each category: the rational choice, the most likely to delight, the darling, and the long shot.

Bingo.

Pick one or two ideas that inspire a physical prototype, a digital prototype, and an experience prototype.

If an idea is so far out there that it seems pointless to test, ask what attracted you to it, then test that aspect or integrate it into a new solution.





Soleil Summer

Impose Constraints

It's a bit counterintuitive, yet imposing constraints (with intention) can actually increase creative potential.

Try it:

Think of as many silver things as you can in ten seconds.

Now think of silver things in your kitchen.

Which prompt sparked more ideas?



How to impose constraints:

It's important to be conscious of when and what constraints you impose. Imposing a constraint during idea generation is different than rejecting ideas due to preconceived notions about users. Consider these three constraint examples.

Ideation.

During a brainstorm, temporarily add a solution constraint. "What if it were made for babies?" "How would McDonald's do it?"

Prototyping.

Constrain materials to build quicker, lower resolution prototypes. Developing a checkout service? Prototype it with cardboard, post-its, and a sharpie. Designing soccer cleats? Your shoe, tape and thumb tacks. Or, impose solution constraints. How might you design it for blind users? Without plastic?

Time.

Constrain time to force output. Make two prototypes in an hour. Spend three hours with users by Friday.

