



20 Tips for Coming Up with Fresh Ideas

By Daniel Scocco

Everyone experiences that moment in time when they are really stuck for fresh ideas. I've compiled a list of tips and tricks that I use when I'm innovating, and each apply if you're trying to come up with new apps, products, or services. Spotting solutions and opportunities is just a form of mental exercise. The more you do it, the better you'll get!

1. **Be really grumpy!** Keep track of the things that annoy you. This is a great place to start, because it helps you know which problems need solutions.
2. **Listen to people complain.** Complaints are a great source of insight (even if they are annoying). Identify common problems that others are experiencing and consider possible solutions to their troubles.
3. **Think like a child.** Children have a fantastically simplistic and candid view of the world, and it sometimes gets lost as we get older. Employ a strong sense of curiosity when looking for solutions. So many things in this world happen due to habit, so thinking like a child helps to break this pattern.
4. **Talk to friends and family.** Seek out what others are thinking. What do they moan about? What problems do they encounter? Do they say stuff like "if only there was a service/product that did XYZ"?
5. **Watch and listen to the news.** Keeping up with current affairs will help you to keep up-to-date with new changes in your community in world. Where there's change, there's usually an opportunity.
6. **Learn from your mistakes.** When you do something wrong, do you work out how and why you made that mistake? What could have limited the impact of your mistakes? Is there something, that if it existed, would have stopped you from making that mistake?
7. **Do volunteer work.** Mixing with people from an entirely different background will help you to think from a different perspective. You can make new friends and get ideas for things you don't usually think about. As a bonus, you help someone too!
8. **Bounce ideas off a friend or classmate.** If there's someone who you work well with, spend time brainstorming ideas together. Two different minds can often lead to great ideas, since you'll feed off each others thoughts.
9. **Think about what you do well.** Look at your current skills and interests, and decide what you do the best. See if these characteristics can be adapted and put to good use across a wider audience. You can do the same by analyzing the skill set of others whom you admire.
10. **Focus on the problem, not existing solutions.** Rather than thinking about existing solutions, go back to the original problem. Given a blank canvas, how would you solve the problem? e.g. rather than re-invent the toilet, come up with alternative ways to dispose of human waste cheaply, conveniently and hygienically.
11. **Go people-watching.** Unleash your inner spy! Spend time watching people go about their everyday lives. What are they doing? How do they do it? Can you spot any obvious problems?
12. **Distract yourself.** Force a change of scenery. Do something that you love doing that has nothing to do with your everyday routine. Get lost in what you're doing. Often we come up with solutions when we're not even thinking about the problem in the first place.

13. **Get feedback.** Make the effort to find out what your friends, family, and classmates think about your ideas. Ask what you could do to improve. Listen to their feedback, good or bad. You'll gain a great deal of insight when you ask people to tell you what they think your strengths are.

14. **Find near-misses.** Consider services, products, or concepts that are too basic or too complex. Sometimes just adjusting an existing solution will yield more ideas.

15. **Critique everything.** Question everything, and ask yourself "why?!" Intelligently analyze your environment and think of improvements. See what lessons you can learn about the good and bad things in your environment.

16. **Read lots.** Any kind of reading material can give you ideas. Find a range of materials that you enjoy reading (there's no point reading something you hate!). Ideas can come from fiction, magazine articles, scientific journals, anything really!

17. **Network, in real life and online.** Listen to people who have similar interests to you and find out what they love or hate. What are the common or repetitive problems they would love solved? This is also a great way to find someone to brainstorm with.

18. **Read online forums and discussions related to your interests.** Forums often have threads dedicated to frequently asked questions (FAQs). You can borrow ideas from these FAQs as well as be on the look out for questions that pop up on the forums on a regular basis.

19. **Look for gaps.** Identify gaps in products and services that exist between your idea and what's already out there. Then consider what you can offer to address that gap.

20. **Keep a notebook handy at all times.** Inspiration can hit you at any time, and you can forget it just as quickly. Keeping a record of this inspiration is vital. Make sure you revisit entries in your notebook on a regular basis too! You might be able to elaborate on ideas you had in the past.

So there you go, 20 tips to help you identify opportunities. There's a common theme among these tips, namely to analyze problems in as much detail as you can. When you get ideas, consider all ideas, regardless of how crazy they might seem. Then weigh up the pros and cons of those ideas as solutions.

Good luck, and have fun!

Dan Harrison is a Web Consultant and Brainstormer. Dan frequently exercises his mind to come up with fresh ideas and opportunities for himself and others through his consulting business.

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