

/// BOOK REVIEW



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Text boosts creativity

Direct marketing expert Peter Whelehan reviews a book on producing creative ideas which has been on the shelves for many years but which is still as relevant today

Many readers of *Marketing.ie* will be interested in the next book release only to see it being 'trumped' the following month by a newer, better and more cutting edge book by Seth Godin, Jay Conrad Levinson, Malcolm McDonald - or whoever has a new book out at a given time.

So I thought I'd take a different approach to the normal magazine review by looking back in an attempt to find a book from the 20th century with strong timeless principles that still apply today. In doing the research I came across a book published possibly before most readers of *Marketing.ie* were born and for which it has stood the test of time.

The theme of the book was initially presented, as a lecture to students, by James Webb Young in 1939. The subsequent book, *A Technique for Producing Ideas*, was published in the 1960's. In the context of great marketing publications it makes the likes of David Ogilvy's 1980's classic, *Ogilvy on Advertising*, look like a relatively new book release.

In the book, Webb Young sets out a five-step process, as follows, for generating creative ideas.

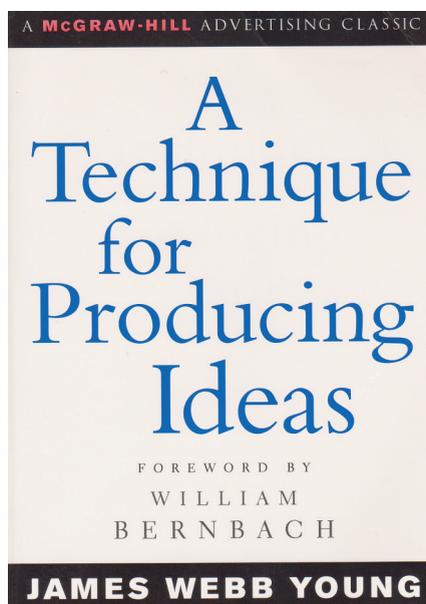
1. GET THE INFORMATION

Gather all the available information (specific and general) on the product for which you want to generate an idea. The more information gathered, the more likely it will be that you'll find a characteristic that can be developed as a USP – Unique Selling Proposition. Consider how Guinness have, for years, been leveraging an apparent negative – the wait for a pint of Guinness to settle – and turned it on its head to use it as their USP.

Young uses a kaleidoscope analogy. Every turn moves the pieces of glass in to new shapes that reflect new relationships and the more pieces of glass the more pictures. So what it means is that the more information that is gathered, the more possibilities arise.

2. DIGEST IT

This is essentially a brainstorming stage but with a bit of structure. It involves looking at and playing with all the material gathered in a very loose way. Bounce ideas back and forth and make notes of any rough ideas.



Don't judge the ideas (at this stage) but note everything down, even if the idea doesn't have much shape yet.

3. LEAVE IT INCUBATE

Do anything you can to take your mind off the issue. Make a conscious decision not to think about it. Distract yourself. While your conscious mind won't be 'on the job', your subconscious will be digesting and organising all the information received.

4. THE BIG IDEA

At some point an idea will jump out and often when least expected. It should be written down straight away. The more under pressure you are the less likely it is this will happen, so try and avoid stress. The idea is most likely to jump out when you're relaxed.

5. MAKE IT HAPPEN

The initial idea is usually a very basic one and in need of development to evolve it in to something that will work, from a practical point of view. So it should be developed with and bounced off others. Let company colleagues critique it but take the feedback onboard.

This little book is a classic that has stood the test of time. It lays out a straightforward, easy to understand and commonsense method to follow for generating ideas. While the technique presented is easy to understand it doesn't mean it's easy to put into practice. But with a little discipline the technique can become highly effective for any individual or organisation.

The technique set out in the book may seem quite simple and there may even be a temptation to just skip to the last two steps. In fact the work done in the very first step is often the key as it lays the foundation from which the idea will eventually come.

It is appropriate to resurrect this book for review as it is a work that many young professionals in the industry may not even be aware of but which should really mandatory reading for everyone.

The technique outlined doesn't just relate to traditional media. It can be applied to any creative medium above, below or through the line including media that didn't exist when the book was written. Bill Bernbach of DDB, who created those superb Volkswagen campaigns, provided the foreword.

It's not solely an advertising and marketing book either. Professionals from scientists to poets, artists and engineers have used all it to generate ideas. So it has broad appeal beyond the obvious creative departments in agencies or client-side marketing departments.

There is no excuse for not getting your hands on a copy of this old gem. At fifty A5 pages it's a quick and easy read, will fit in your back pocket and it won't break the bank either – costing not much more than €5.

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