6 Steps for Boosting Creativity in Your Team’s Next Virtual Meeting

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Just when you thought you have read every possible piece of working from home (WFH) advice these past few days, allow us to bring you a new acronym: BFH, or brainstorming from home. As teams work from home over the coming weeks, and face-to-face meetings get swapped for video chats, remote working poses a particular challenge for adland. It’s always been challenging to get people in different locations to participate at the same pace and enthusiasm as they do when in the same room. Now, with WFH as the new normal, here are some tips to get the most out of your team brainstorming sessions while working remotely.

The mighty moderator

Having a dedicated moderator will go a long way in encouraging introverts, helping to clarify ideas, spark further builds and even cutting short long-winded inputs. They should start each brainstorm with a well-articulated brief, then keep things engaging throughout. Make the objective short enough to be the meeting title and share the brief ahead of the scheduled meeting time. This puts the goal front and center for the duration of the brainstorm. The moderator should also keep an eye out for people who look like they want to share a thought, but can’t find a moment to do so.

The format

It’s no secret that video conferences are the way to go. While conference calls have their benefits, brainstorms need high engagement and focus. For that, video calls help keep everyone focused and accountable. A Myers Briggs study revealed that 50% of the U.S. population is made up of introverts, which can make online brainstorm sessions even more challenging. Once everyone has had a chance to digest the brief, the moderator should try to give each participant 60 seconds to share their thoughts and ideas.

Breaking the ice

Breaking the ice is particularly important for online brainstorms. It’s all too easy to be on mute for the duration of the call. Choose icebreakers that encourage people to verbalize ideas early and often. These are key because online brainstorms need to be well structured, but not so structured that it stifles spontaneity. Standing also tends to lift energy and participation, so try getting everyone on their feet from the start.

Mind mapping and note-taking

Mind mapping is a process where the thought is placed at the center, and participants are invited to build more ideas upon that central thought. Instead of relying on conversation, inject some creativity with visuals. Encourage everyone to have a notebook with them during the brainstorm, so they can jot down ideas and talk the group through the idea.

Apps like MindMeister and Mindomo create mind maps online. The best part about them is that they can be easily integrated into widely used office productivity platforms like Microsoft Teams. The level of productivity this allows is incredibly high, as everyone is building on ideas in real-time. It may also be useful to dedicate a scribe to keep notes in a shared document. If that’s not practical, platforms like Microsoft

Teams can transcribe calls for you to refer to later (as long as everyone is OK with being recorded, of course).

Quietstorming

Every once in a while, the most productive moment of a brainstorm is when participants take a few minutes to write their ideas on a document and come back to share it with the team. Plan for this quiet moment by inviting all participants to contribute songs to a playlist on Spotify that you play over the conference call when everyone is noting their ideas. Online tools like Trello creates idea cards that serve as clusters for participants' inputs.

Show and sell and roleplay

Show and sell is a prop-based ideation technique where individuals create an advertising pitch with props from their homes. This is an interesting way to get people on camera, have some laughs and, more importantly, generate creative ideas that would otherwise be hard to do over a call. This technique also brings a higher level of involvement as people show off their quirky personalities. Additionally, role-playing is an effective way to arrive at need gaps in the service industry, and video calls foster these brainstorms. In this technique, people imagine themselves in the role of a consumer whose experience relates to the marketing objective and act out a service experience on the call. The rest can note insights, challenges and pain points, which then get translated into insights and ideas in work sessions.

In the end, as any strategist would tell you, it always helps to have a structure for your brainstorms. Going into these virtual sessions with a clear plan will allow the participants to be spontaneous and deliver (virtual) creativity. Good luck, and happy BFH!

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