

How to Spot Business Ideas Worth Pursuing

March 12, 2021 5 min read

Opinions expressed by *Entrepreneur* contributors are their own.

Nothing propels a company more quickly than innovation, and nothing stifles it more quickly than a “that’s how we’ve always done it” attitude.

News startup Axios is an excellent example of a company breaking barriers and thinking outside the box. The company is making a big bet that other companies will pay to learn how to write like Axios reporters. The new communications platform, AxiosHQ, launched in February and enables companies to send Axios-style, just-the-facts internal newsletters. Its cost? At least \$10,000 annually. It remains to be seen whether executives will be willing to invest that kind of money, but it’s a fascinating proposition.

Related: Why Your Marketing Team Should Be Journalists

What does it take for organizations to vet, approve and develop similarly innovative ideas? The answer is not simple, and it varies from company to company. Innovation efforts get plenty of lip service, but it’s much harder to perfect a process for selecting and implementing top ideas.

No magic wand for innovation

In the same way that data-driven decisions run many aspects of an organization, leaders need to use data to create a rubric

for vetting innovative ideas. This enforces discipline and keeps everyone on the same page.

Without an evaluation process, innovation programs become short-sighted and may fall out of alignment with long-term organizational goals. Having an organized process also removes emotion from decision-making to keep project focus and dollar spend as data-driven as possible.

For innovation to succeed, leaders also have to be aligned around critical factors. This forms a living rubric that can be adapted throughout the organization as business needs shift and evolve. Generally, some sort of innovation leader – a chief innovation officer, a chief strategy officer or a business unit leader – will lead this team to ensure the process runs smoothly and stays on track.

When we developed our rubric at Coplex, we struggled to find a technical solution that was flexible enough while still enabling us to manage our ideas. We ended up building one ourselves. We now use this tool to drive the underlying engine of our entire idea management process, and it works because effective innovation strategy always starts at the top. Bring your entire leadership team together from the beginning of the process to discuss priorities and foster conversations about ideas, outlining your concrete vision along the way.

Related: Did Someone Reject Your Idea? Because of Coronavirus, They Might Reconsider

Here are three ways to evaluate your innovation ideas and create a framework to make them a strategic reality:

1. Create an innovation blueprint

Before you begin to gather ideas from your team, you have to first come up with a blueprint – such as Google's Eight Pillars of Innovation – that defines the initiative's overall

structure. This helps put up guardrails around the problem spaces the organization is willing to play in and, more importantly, which problem spaces are off-limits.

An innovation blueprint consists of three distinct components: statement, antithesis and thesis. Your statement defines your company's ambitions and outlines why you believe in what you're doing, why now is the best time to do it and what makes you the best candidate for the job. From here, develop an antithesis that defines the problems, business models and core technologies you don't intend to address. Why? It removes distractions and keeps the focus on priorities. Finally, create a thesis that gives you a clear lens into how you'll invest in problem spaces, business models and technologies to create the change you want to see.

2. Define innovation themes

Once you've developed a solid blueprint, it's time to identify the themes of problem spaces you intend to solve. This step will define the categories in which your innovation ideas should fall while clearly outlining how your solutions could come into play.

Think of this as similar to how the National Association of Engineers (NAE) outlines the many challenges left to overcome in its field. In its report on the grand challenges of engineering, NAE defines themes (e.g., joy, sustainability, health and security) as areas ripe for innovation and abundant with opportunity.

The core reason for taking this approach? It allows you to consider potential ways to innovate beyond what the organization had imagined before – and to set goals with those parameters in mind.

Related: What Sustainable Innovation Might Look Like in 2021

3. Map measurement criteria back to a rubric

Once you've defined your innovation themes, it's time to develop the criteria you'll use to measure your success. Global design firm IDEO made it a goal to quantify innovation by looking at its clients' internal team dynamics as well as other companies focused on innovation. The firm identified six areas key to innovation and then sent its survey, coined "Creative Difference," to larger organizations to understand how team members were performing when it came to innovation. Once the survey was complete, IDEO sent results with tangible innovation metrics and recommendations on how to follow and meet them moving forward.

As you define how you measure innovation and create your unique rubric, keep in mind that you aren't limited to traditional metrics. Feel comfortable being creative and innovative as you decide on those! It's possible to measure everything from societal impact and economic value to organizational scale and new market discovery.

The process of pursuing innovative ideas requires much more than a quick brainstorming session or selecting an appealing idea from a list. By creating an underlying philosophy and structure governing the prioritization of ideas that flow through an organization, you can retain control over your innovation program's outcomes instead of leaving anything to chance.

<https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/364542>