

Innovations: Complexions, Complications or Complexes...and the Wisdom to know the Difference

by Lanny Vincent

Much of the success of any innovation can be attributed to the way in which it is introduced.

A good personal introduction is based on the introducer's understanding of his or her "audience." An effective introduction of an innovation is no different. Experienced innovators know that their success is contingent upon their knowledge of the surrounding ecology or system in which the innovation will be used and into which it will be introduced.

Kimberly-Clark Corporation learned this lesson the hard way many years ago with Avert®. Ranked as one of the most innovative new products by the NPD Group the year it was in test market, Avert was a tissue-based product that could "prevent the spread of colds" by killing Herpes-2 virus in five seconds with a patented ascorbic acid treatment. Avert was quite naturally marketed as a facial tissue, that being with what Kimberly-Clark, the makers of Kleenex® tissues, was most familiar. After all, Avert looked like a facial tissue, felt like a facial tissue, and was packaged like a facial tissue. Therefore it must be a facial tissue.

In hindsight, it quickly became apparent that although Avert had the appearance of a facial tissue, its primary benefit suggested that it belonged not in the paper products aisle, but in the cold remedy aisle. As a cold remedy, it may have lasted longer in the market.

The point is that every innovation requires some kind of introduction given its "newness." Every innovation needs to be integrated and assimilated into the existing system. Innovators who

underestimate the introduction challenge are often left wondering why the world did not beat a path to the door of their elegant new solution.

Not only must innovators be creative in conceiving and developing the innovation, they also have to anticipate the changes that will need to occur in the system into which the innovation will be introduced and integrated. Hence, a solid understanding of the system, its causes and effect, is absolutely necessary. Here is where wisdom and discernment, built upon as much analysis as possible, is essential.

Will your innovation affect only the surface or skin of the system? Or will it need to go deeper into the system into which it is introduced? And if it goes deeper, will it be perceived as a complication or a fitting

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COACH'S CORNER

Passion Transcends Rejection and Disappointment

By William Gulvas

Rejection and disappointment are facts of life and an innovator continuously runs into these two reactions. How many times is an idea or system of thought rejected before it can reach the right ears?

The answer is, an infinite number of times. If you think you have a good idea it has to be pushed through all the doubts of others if it is to stand on its own eventually. If the thought process has any merit, people will finally recognize it and it will be accepted.

My experience is that the majority of people get bogged down with what other people think of their idea, which is an understandable reaction. While I don't

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relief in modifying a burdensome complex that is already there?

Many innovations don't go much below the surface. Call them dermatological innovations. Their beauty is only skin-deep. These innovations may be designed for the sake of differentiation alone. Tier 1 and 2 auto suppliers have struggled for years with innovations for the sake of differentiation alone, living as they do under the tyranny of the "Big Three." These innovations often end up not very sustainable because they are about the complexion of the systems into which they are introduced

Where do we get wisdom to tell the difference between these different types of innovations?

more than they affect the structure. Innovations like these are often easy come-easy go and end up churning a lot of the innovator's resources. A classic example of this innovation churn was the so-called cookie wars. Many new cookie forms were introduced, but few were supported in any sustainable manner. Dermatological innovations like this leave us with novelty that is only skin-deep.

Unlike complexion-level innovations (too much design and too little substance), some innovations suffer from the opposite: complication. These are the innovations that might succeed with the enthusiasts who have the time, passion and patience to deal with poor product design and the inability of the innovator to make the tough choices for the user. Many consumer elec-

tronics innovations make their entrance as complications more than innovations and when they sport more features than can be readily used and understood by end-users. My new smart phone is a case in point: full of capabilities only a small percentage of which I am likely to use.

The third type of innovation—those that sell themselves and approximate a truly elegant solution—offer a solution to a structural problem and, as such, take hold in a sustainable way by altering the system into which they are introduced. The proverbial iPod example is just such a case in point. Elegant design with known MP3 technology coupled with a well-executed iTunes web service is only part of the story. What Apple and Steve Jobs (a master introducer) also did was restructure the way we buy music. Through iPod/iTunes, consumers were freed from the structural tyranny of having to buy music in albums. Now we could buy singles again, only this time we could get them delivered digitally. The success of iPod/iTunes was based on a solid understanding of the system into which iPod/iTunes was introduced.

Where do we get wisdom to tell the difference between these different types of innovations?

Recently we were reminded of the difference between the corporate "pasture, free range, and wilderness."* The reminder came in the form of an article by Joseph Meeker, Ph.D., brought to our attention by Stuart Brown. Meeker's article is titled "Wisdom and Wilderness" and was published, interestingly enough, in *Landscape* magazine.

While Meeker's comments have to do with the wisdom and wilderness in the natural world, what he has to say carries relevance for innovators in differentiating the existing markets (corporate pastures), from embryonic new markets (free range), and from the innovation wilderness.

Meeker writes, "Our minds and souls have roots in the untamed processes of nature. Preserving wilderness is human self-preservation. What better image of old age

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Passion Transcends

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advocate pushing a point beyond rationality, I do encourage you to believe in your idea passionately and walk through the mud if you have to in order to prove your point.

Yet at no point in this process can you surrender to emotion. In other words, it serves no merit to blame other people for not understanding your thought process. Everything worthwhile takes time and I have found the longer you wait for your idea to manifest itself the more people will appreciate your patience. Of course, none of this can be accomplished without your own passion for the idea. □

A letter carrier for 38 years and Vietnam Vet (First Air Cavalry 1966-67), William Gulvas is retired and in the process of turning his 50 acre farm in Northwest Michigan into a tree farm. Gulvas, who is the son-in-law of Lanny Vincent's friend and mentor, Bill Wilson, is also a student of innovation and does a lot of reading when the snow gets too deep to cut trees and work on next year's firewood.

could we hope for than the prospect of wisdom contemplating wilderness? Few treasures are more valuable than these two forms of complex maturity. The rest of us need to study and learn from both in an effort to enrich our lives and our world. In the end, wilderness is nature's way of being wise, and wisdom is the mind's way of being natural."

We can get more from fewer innovations when we better understand how the innovation fits (or not) in the users eco-system into which we envision it being introduced. This presumes at least some understanding and empathy for the structure of the system into which the innovation will be introduced and how it will or will not affect that system.

Wisdom comes from an awareness not just of one boundary (the border between the corporate pasture and the free range); it also requires an ability to tell the difference between what is wild and what is in that range of proximity that we call free. □

**The Maverick Way: Profiting from the Power of the Corporate Misfit (Cheverton, et. al. 2000).*

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