

Opening The Doors To Innovation

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Picture it. It was a rare but perfect sunny, 80-degree day in the city of Chicago and a 100 or so people gathered to talk about the future of innovation. Hailing from Texas -- where the temperature has exceeded the 100-degree mark for 60 days and counting -- what better way could I spend three days in August?

I recently attended the 3rd Annual Open Innovation Summit at the Knickerbocker Hotel in the heart of Chicago's Miracle Mile. Like many, I've learned to dread the dull and redundant nature of most conferences, but this summit proved to be much more than a good excuse to get out of the office and into a cooler climate.

For starters, Dr. Navin Khude from [The Clorox Company](#) [1] gave a great lecture on why Clorox has invested in open innovation. Clorox has always been a household name and, as a result, the company receives an abundant number of unsolicited ideas for new products.

Sounds great, right? Unfortunately, many of the ideas didn't make it to the right person (we all have sent something to the info@companyx.com [2]). Six months later, an angry caller would contact Clorox, claiming that the company stole his/her idea because it was seen on a grocery store shelf.

Of course, those of us in this business know it takes a lot longer than six months to bring a product to market, but that didn't stop the negative consumer perception. Clorox didn't have a way for external ideas to be heard, which meant the company wasn't listening to customers tell them how to make a better product.

Clorox launched an *Open Innovation Forum* that allows outside ideas to be heard and invites consumers and inventors into the innovation realm. Not only are people asked to suggest ideas, but they are actually compensated if the company moves forward with the idea.

Clorox isn't the first, or the last, company to have an open innovation platform that allows anyone to participate. This notion of outside participation is a trend that is gaining momentum from many different industries including food (Kraft), beverage

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(Pepsico), and the government (SBIR/STTR programs).

The most inspiring speaker at the summit was Will Suvari of [Maddock Douglass](#) [3], a marketing and innovation powerhouse based out of Chicago. Suvari addressed a hot topic: *Innovation in Healthcare and Why the U.S. Is Being Left Behind*.

Suvari didn't just point out the problems that will continue to ail America if this country insists on heading down its current path, he offered potential solutions. Not simple solutions put in place by government, but solutions that come from being more innovative and creating opportunities to cut the cost of healthcare.

Why is it, for example, that we must see a doctor in person? We all know it's important to stay on top of our health, but the truth is that we (especially Gen-Xers) don't see a doctor unless we're very sick. What if we could stop by and see the doctor for a quick check-up and physical while at the mall or drug store? What if we could stop by the coffee shop and have that mole checked out? If it was more convenient, more people might actually practice preventative medicine -- and that could save our country millions on healthcare spending.

Suvari also asks us to consider what might happen if cancer treatments could be delivered at a drugstore, or Wal-Mart, rather than a hospital. Chemotherapy is an easy treatment delivered via injection. Same procedure, same drugs just a different location. Imagine the cost savings.

I know this is all easier said than done, but Suvari challenges the healthcare industry to think outside the box. If we're willing to let in some external ideas, we might open up an entirely new realm of opportunity that could create jobs and make healthcare more affordable.

The Open Innovation Summit offered more than a dozen lectures across a broad spectrum of industries, from pharmaceuticals to telecom to packaging. If this conference was any indication -- and we can only hope it offers some glimmer of the future -- companies are beginning to understand the value of allowing employees and outsiders to pitch the "next great idea."

This notion of open or collaborative innovation requires upper management buy-in and support as well as strong internal processes. More ideas beget more creativity and farther reaching accomplishments, and that must be a better prospect for all of us.

Check out more on PCDworks at <http://www.pcdworks.com/> [4].

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[1] <http://www.thecloroxcompany.com/>

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[2] <mailto:info@companyx.com>

[3] <http://www.maddockdouglas.com/>

[4] <http://www.pcdworks.com/>