

Hyper-Creatives

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Every change in the marketplace, every upheaval in the economy, every shift in technology, and every change in consumer attitudes and outlook creates opportunities for successful new products.

Since these changes are amplified during tough times, new product opportunities are actually more numerous during economic turbulence.

The companies that develop and deploy new products during economic downturns tend to outperform their more timid rivals during the recession and come roaring out of the starting gates when the economy begins to expand.

One way to keep new products flowing to market during tough times is to rely on “hyper-creatives.” These are people in the target market who are exceptionally creative in coming up with new product ideas.

These individuals can generate many more new product ideas than the average person, and the quality of their ideas far exceeds the output of their noncreative neighbors. This ability is called “idea-centric creativity.”

Hyper-creatives are particularly valuable now because it is quite common for companies to cut or defer new product development when the economy is weak. But even during the best of times companies struggle with inherent obstacles that

undermine their new-product development efforts:

- **Group Think** – We are all copycats. We all think we are original and creative when we are only thinking what our “group” has ordained as true or acceptable. Conventional wisdom is just that: conventional.
- **Targeting Error** – If you were permitted to review the marketing plans of the top 100 brands in the U.S., you would think that most people in the U.S. die by the age of 35, or certainly by 50. Why are older consumers ignored? How many new product opportunities are overlooked?
- **Lack of Customer Knowledge** – If you read the annual reports of Fortune 500 companies and listen to the speeches of their executives, you would think these companies spend massively on marketing research and know every detail about their markets, customers and prospects. Sadly, the truth is that most companies do not really understand their customers or prospective customers because they don’t do their research homework -- or don’t do it well.
- **Complexity** – Large companies employ many extraordinarily smart people, many with advanced degrees from the best-known universities where they have learned the value of “complexity” and complex thinking. This initial training in complexity continues as they graduate and move into large corporations where complexity is often the currency of advancement. The more complexity one can offer, the smarter that person is perceived to be, and the more qualified for promotion. Complexity is another name for confusion and diffusion (both barriers to new product development).
- **Lack of Empathy** – Corporate decision makers tend to be out of touch with their target audiences in many instances. These executives tend to be better educated, higher in income, and isolated in upscale neighborhoods, with very different lifestyles than the average man on the street. It’s often difficult for these executives to relate to and understand the common consumers who make up their target markets.
- **Too Many Cooks** – Large companies are made up of many ambitious individuals and fiefdoms, all competing for attention, power and influence. New product ideas tend to get torn to pieces by this internal competition. New product efforts, particularly during the formative stages, must be tightly controlled by a very small group to have much chance of success.

These commonplace barriers, combined with budget cuts during economic downturns, often make it very difficult for companies to develop new products during economic adversity. This is where hyper-creative consumers can be especially beneficial. Creativity alone, however, is not enough.

Hyper-creatives must also have relevant product category experience. If you are trying to develop a new toy, you want to find hyper-creatives who have children in their lives -- not only parents, but grandparents, aunts and uncles.

Their personal experiences with the product category, and their households’

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experiences, will implicitly guide the new product ideation process. These experiences will also help ensure that the product ideas are relevant to the target market.

One more thing is important in tough economic times. The hyper-creatives selected for new product ideation must be on the front lines, in the trenches, personally experiencing the recession and its effects. That is, the hyper-creatives selected for new product ideation must be aware of -- and sensitive to -- the changes and shifts caused by the economic downturn.

Who are these hyper-creative people? We have tested more than 200,000 consumers over the past decade for idea-centric creativity, and here is what we have learned.

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If you ask people directly if they are creative, a large majority of the adult population in the U.S. classify themselves as “very creative and imaginative,” but our testing indicates that less than 4 percent of the population falls into this hyper-creative category. Who are these hyper-creative individuals? Younger people tend to be more creative than older people, but surprisingly the fall off in idea-centric creativity as people age tends to be minimal until the age of 54, after which “creativity decay” appears to accelerate.

Age Range	Idea-Centric Creativity Index
18-24	114
25-34	109
35-44	106
45-54	93
55-64	77
65 or older	53

While idea-centric creativity declines with age, there are still many older consumers (aged 55+) who retain high levels of idea-centric creativity.

Education tends to positively correlate with exceptional creativity. That is, educational achievement tends to be predictive of idea-centric creativity.

Educational Level Attained	Idea-Centric Creativity Index
High school or less	35

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Trade school/Technical school	75
Some college/Associate's degree	108
College graduate/Bachelor's degree	127
Graduate work/Advanced degree	137

This correlation between educational attainment and idea-centric creativity suggests that achievement in school helps develop creativity, or at least helps to identify creativity. Since younger people tend to be better educated than older people in the U.S., part of this "education effect" is related to youthfulness rather than the benefits of education. However, our testing over the years has identified many hyper-creatives with little formal education.

Gender appears to be a poor predictor of idea-centric creativity. Men and women tend to be roughly equal in creativity (when scores are adjusted for education and age differences), although each sex does better in generating new product ideas in product categories where their interests and relevant experiences are concentrated.

Ethnicity is a poor predictor of exceptional creativity (when adjusted by age and education). Minorities, on average, tend to be as creative as the Anglo majority. Other types of creativity (artistic, musical, literary, and theatrical) are only weakly predictive of idea-centric creativity. No matter how the regression techniques were manipulated, other types of creativity (alone or in combination) never showed up as major variables in predicting idea-centric creativity.

Where people live is not predictive of idea-centric creativity. Hyper-creatives live all over the U.S., in large urban areas, in small towns, and in rural areas. Hyper-creatives also live in Europe, Asia, Latin America, and elsewhere.

You can't spot these new-product geniuses on the street. They look like everyone else, dress like everyone else, and talk like everyone else. But they are unique in two special ways: Ask them to come up with new product ideas, and they will come up with many more new product ideas than the average person, and the originality of these ideas will be exceptional.

Hyper-Creatives & Ideation

What is the best way to use these creative individuals to generate new product ideas? First, creativity does not take place in a vacuum. New product creation demands starting points and focal points. Creativity must have rails to run on, a purpose, and a destination.

Client involvement is critical to the success of a new products project because clients are the experts on their companies' goals, technical capabilities, risk tolerances, marketing strengths, and budget capacities. Clients' knowledge and

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understanding, as well as their feedback along the way, create the guidelines and context that help ensure the successful outcome of a new product ideation project.

Once the new product development goals are fully understood, these goals are translated into starting points for the ideation process. Ideation sessions can be in-person (all-day group sessions with eight to 10 hyper-creatives and facilitators) or online with a larger number of hyper-creatives.

Opportunity Knocks

Recessions create many new product opportunities. Hyper-creatives who are experiencing the economic downturn have more sensitive ears than the rest of us and can hear the faint sounds of opportunity's faraway tapping. Hyper-creatives can help power growth during tough times.

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