How to Approach Presentation Design Like an Innovative Thinking Genius
The People Behind SmartStorming®

Mitchell Rigie and Keith Harmeyer are authors, speakers, consultants, and trainers on the topics of innovative thinking, idea generation and creative problem solving. The SmartStorming Partners have a combined 50+ years of experience working in the fields of advertising and strategic marketing communications, persuasive communication, and personal development.

Through their workshops, keynotes, and consulting practice, Mitchell and Keith have shared their insights with an international audience of thousands of corporate professionals from companies like Google, Under Armour, NBCUniversal, Pfizer, Siemens, Diageo, Omnicom Group, WPP, E! Network, Telemundo, Macmillan Publishing, as well as with graduate students at the MIT Sloan School of Management.

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The SmartStorming Book

**SmartStorming: The Game-Changing Process for Generating Bigger, Better Ideas** is one of the most comprehensive how-to manuals and idea generation toolkits ever published on the subject of brainstorming. Readers are introduced to a totally new approach to group ideation. Not just another creative-thinking technique, SmartStorming is a powerful brainstorming system, combining the essential structure, leadership skills, tools, and techniques necessary for success.

Plus, it includes a valuable toolkit filled with planners, checklists, “cheat sheets,” and detailed instructions for 20 super-productive, idea-generation techniques, many of which are unavailable anywhere else.

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You will learn a set of proven innovative thinking principles, tools and techniques that will provide you with greater confidence, and allow you to generate ideas far more efficiently and effectively than ever before.

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We’ve become so focused on execution, on using the amazing technology available to us today to produce our work, that we sometimes forget about the idea.

A simple, but workable definition of innovation: “the introduction of something new or different that delivers greater value or benefit.”

In order to be innovative, it must not only be new or different... it must deliver greater value or benefit. In other words, it must improve upon something that came before it.

There are actually 3 different ways you can innovate something.

Incremental innovation – where you take something that already exists and make it better... like adding new features to an already existing product. This is the most common type of innovation.

Evolutionary innovation – where you produce something that represents the “next step” in development, something that’s distinctly new and different... like redefining a product using a totally new technology.

And revolutionary innovation – creating something that has never been seen or done before, something that changes minds and perceptions... like the microchip or social media.
Don’t you think the world has seen enough “me too” presentations? Haven’t too many people been lulled to sleep by “status quo” presentation design?

You owe it to your work and your audiences to make your presentations the best and most innovative they can be.

Innovation of any kind requires ideas—fresh, bold, game-changing ideas.

In fact, all great work starts with an idea, and presentations are no exception. And the more innovative the idea, the more exceptional the end product will be.

So why not approach presentation design the way an innovative thinking genius would?
Innovators know their audience.

How can you possibly design a unique and effective presentation if you don’t have a thorough understanding of the people being presented to?

Who are they? Why will they be attending your presentation? What are their needs, wants, challenges? When it comes to your message, what’s in it for them?

“Grokking” is a technique you can use to develop a deeper understanding of your audience. To “grok” someone simply means to know and understand them at a much deeper level.

For a few moments, think about someone in the audience for your last presentation. If possible, think of a specific individual.

Who are they? What are they really like? Try to really get a feel for the type of person they are.

When it comes to your presentation, what really matters to THEM? What do they need to hear from you? What do you know about them personally? What tone/style works best for them, etc. What’s the best way for you to “get on their frequency” when communicating with them?

Next, great innovative thinkers have a clear vision for what they want to achieve – before they begin creating it.

All great innovations are created TWICE. First, there is a mental creation - a vision for “what can be.” The second is the physical (real world) creation.

The physical creation follows the mental... just as a building follows a blueprint.
All great innovators had a crystal clear vision of what they wanted to achieve?
When it comes to your next presentation, what is the key takeaway you want your audience to have? What action do you want them to take?

Envision what a successful presentation would have to accomplish. Be as specific as possible. The more you can visualize it... the faster and easier it will be to create it.

Try something fun the next time you start a new presentation. Before you fire up Photoshop and PowerPoint, sketch it out on paper first.

Again, work on your IDEAS first ...and then sit at the computer and make them real. And see how much richer and more innovative your work becomes.

Remember... your vision – your BIG IDEA – not only serves as your inspiration. It’s also your north star, pointing the way from where are today, ...to your desired future destination: a big, game-changing presentation.

Every decision you make in terms of content, layout, design, and technology should be measured against achieving your goals.

The third trait of highly innovative thinkers is that they love to play “What if...?”

A lack of knowledge, skill and experience can ALL be underlying causes—of poorly designed and executed presentations. But even more damaging is a lack of imagination.

To play “What If” really requires two things...

First, you need to have new and interesting “creative stuff” in your head to play around with –

The way you get that stuff is by... continually stocking your creative reservoir (that incredible organ between your ears)— before you go fishing for idea.
Thanks to the Internet, technology and social media, new stimuli is EVERYWHERE...online, in movies, on television, in museums, plays, on our cell phone, in casual conversations with others.

Be on the lookout for anything that might provide that catalyst – that idea or insight – that you can use in your next presentation.

Next, it’s important that you question any and all assumptions you have about the work you do.

What do you assume you “must” do? What do you believe you “can’t” do?

When people say they need to think outside the box... what they really mean to say is, they need to think outside their limiting assumptions and beliefs... about what may, or may not be possible.

When you think about designing a presentation, what do you assume you have to do, and what do you believe you can't do?

The answer to those two questions defines... the box that limits your innovative creative thinking.

Now just imagine if were no limitations on you whatsoever, what you would do – what types of things would you try?

Next, innovators do audacious things. They take risks.

What one element of your presentation can you make better and more interesting than it was in the past?
In what unexpected ways can you structure and present the content? In what new and different ways can you incorporate images, video or audio?

In what ways could you employ color to make the audience sit up and take notice? In what ways can you go “template-less,” and made each slide just a little different?

Innovators aren’t afraid to fail.

All great innovators understand that temporary failure… is an important stepping stone to success. They learn something new and important from each failure—then try again, and again.

The only time you really ever fail… is when you give up trying… or give in to mediocrity.

Innovative thinking geniuses, by definition, try new and different things.

But when something doesn’t work, they don’t give up and return to the status quo.

They course-correct, make adjustments, tweak, and try again—until their ideas work… and they change the game.

Finally, innovators benchmark their success.

They determine, ahead of time, what a successful outcome looks like – and they evaluate their work against it.

Did your last presentation do what you wanted it to do? Did it achieve all of your goals? Did it get the response you intended? Did the audience take the action you wanted them to take?

What can you do differently next time to produce even more positive results?
Isn’t it time to start approaching your work like an innovative thinking genius?

It all starts with YOUR idea.
Idea Sprinting

(High-velocity thinking technique)

Idea Sprinting is a fast-paced, “beat the clock” idea-generation technique. It's specifically designed to help you generate a large quantity of new ideas over a short period of time. This high-velocity activity gets your attention focused and your creative juices flowing; there is no time for inhibitions or self-consciousness.

Instructions:

1. Focus on the issue, challenge, or opportunity to be addressed.

2. Challenge yourself to come up with an ambitious number of new ideas to achieve within a tight time frame. For example:

   “Ten (or more) ideas in the next five minutes!”

   “Fifteen (or more) new ideas in the next ten minutes!”

The goal of this exercise is to go for quantity over quality. Generate ideas as quickly and spontaneously as possible without thinking too long about each one. Remember to postpone all judgment. Go for wild and edgy ideas. Use sticky notes for this exercise. Write (or draw) one idea per note.

3. Set a timer to the number of minutes you’ve decided on.

4. When you are ready to generate ideas, say out loud: “Time begins... NOW!” Start the timer immediately. When you are done, select your most promising ideas. Set them aside for now. Take a short break to clear your mind, then repeat the “Idea Sprinting” process as many times as you wish.

Thought-provoking questions to ask yourself:

- What's the most obvious idea I can think of?
- What's the opposite of that?
- What is similar/different?
- What are some “bad ideas”?
- How do I make them good ideas?
- What else haven’t I thought of?
- What are two or three other ways/variants/options...?
- What if...?
- What is the most outrageous thing I can think of?
- What would solve this problem instantly?
- What would Apple or Nike do?