

INNOVATION GAMES®: THE HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL WAY TO FIND BREAKTHROUGH IDEAS AND INNOVATIONS

innovation games

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Can playing games really lead to innovations? Yes, with Innovation Games!

Have you ever been in a staff "ideation" meeting where the purpose was to come up with a list of groundbreaking, business-building, innovative ideas...and no one could come up with anything? Or if someone did throw out an idea, everyone shot it down? We've all been there at one time or another, hoping the session would quickly end and we could all go back to what we were doing, which was the same old thing in the same old ways.

Ready for something different? How about something that gets teams engaged, encourages them to work together, and enables them to arrive at breakthrough ideas and accomplish goals faster, all while having fun. What is this magic solution, you ask? [Innovation Games](#).

So, what are Innovation Games?

Developed by Luke Hohmann, Innovation Games are "serious games" that engage people in a way that frees their brains from their preconceived mind-maps and old associations ("We have always done it this way"), allowing them to create new ideas in a playful, game-like environment without risking their egos or endangering their jobs. The brain has been well-tooled to think in a particular way and these constraints can effectively be overcome with games.

Why are Innovation Games so successful?

The success of Innovation Games comes from the way they encourage collaborative play among participants, while at the same time a set of observers are capturing the ideas, insights and body language of the players — those unspoken cues that reveal how people really feel. It's all about discovery, both within the do-ers and the watchers.

There is no such thing as a bad idea when someone engages in play. Play allows people to be creative without fear of failure, to think out of the box without risk. At SAMC, we use Innovation Games with many of our clients and have found that in most situations, they are far better than brainstorming sessions or focus groups.



There are dozens of Innovation Games to choose from. Use one, or several, when you want to:

- Develop brand strategy
- Uncover unspoken, unmet consumer needs
- Find breakthrough opportunities
- Make better strategic decisions
- Identify a [Blue Ocean Strategy®](#) for growth
- Understand how your services fit your customers' needs and lifestyles (or don't)
- Deliver the right new features
- Better understand the customer's experience
- Really listen to clients' frustrations
- Enable your team to hang out and watch customers solve problems
- Find new market space that people haven't even thought about
- Engage your customers in co-creating your products or services
- Substantially improve the way your company is doing things
- Increase efficiencies and find better ways to produce or service your products

How to choose the right Innovation Game? Focus on these five criteria:

1. **The number of people** who can play the game at any one time.
2. **Supplies or materials necessary** to play the game.
3. **How much background education is necessary** to provide data or content for the game.
4. **Degree of customer preparation:** what pre-game activities, if any, should you require of the participants before entering the game environment.
5. **Time frame:** how long after the game finishes should participants expect a product or service to improve to reflect the game’s results.

Here are some of our favorites:

1. Reverse Everything

If you want to get a small group of people to create an amazing number of ideas quickly, try “Reverse Everything.” Here is how it works:

- List all your assumptions about you today.
- Reverse each assumption.
- Ask yourself how to accomplish a goal with new ideas.
- It's not about changing your mind. It's about finding other possibilities that exist and making different choices.

For instance, if you sell neck pillows:

Today	Opposite	New Elements
We sell neck pillows	We don't sell We don't focus on neck pillows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sell online direct to consumers • Have unique websites • Use network marketing • Develop own stores • Create mobile app to enable easier purchases • Focus on children • Become back remediation experts • Become an evaluator of products and sell “best in breed”
We have sales people	No sales people	
Work with distributors	No distributors	
Have only our own products	Sell many lines of products	
We manufacture	We don't	
Don't sell direct to consumers	We do	

2. Build a Better Product Box

One of the original 12 games that started it all, this exercise helps you identify the most exciting features of a product or service, as revealed by your customers.



Begin by asking your customers to imagine that they're selling your product at a trade show, retail outlet or public market. Give them a few cardboard boxes and ask them to literally design a box that represents your product or service. It might have key marketing slogans or tag lines that refocus the company in new directions. When they're finished, pretend you're a skeptical prospect and ask them to "sell" their box to you. Who sells the best?

3. Remember the Future

This one takes a backward-planning approach that works well to help people see where they want to go by seeing how they got there.



4. Now/Wow/How

This is one of the simplest, most useful and most popular games that we use because it forces people to prioritize. The Now/Wow/How matrix is an idea selection tool that breaks the “creadox” (creative paradox) by forcing people to weigh each idea on 2 parameters: ability to implement (easy vs. impossible) and quality of the idea (normal vs. original). As you'll find out, it's a lot harder than it looks!



Innovation Games can work for any industry

Games create randomness within rules. Whether it’s a CEO or an admin, they take people into a new space where their minds are free to let new ideas bubble up as they explore “what ifs.” In our work with clients, we have found this to be true across market sectors.

For example, in our workshops we have observed CEOs and their management teams play Innovation Games. The games proved to be an extremely valuable way for these C-suite leaders and their managers to “see, feel and think” in totally different ways about their business, their products and services, their customers and non-customers, and in some cases, themselves. Particularly in these fast-changing times, Innovation Games are essential to any company's toolkit.

Innovation: easy to say, hard to do

The word "innovation" is thrown around a lot these days, almost so often that it has lost its meaning. Every CEO wants his/her company to be the next Apple or Airbnb or Uber but

they're not actually doing anything to encourage the very innovation they want to see. Is this true for you and your company?

What are you doing in your organization to encourage idea generation, convert ideas into innovations, and support an innovative culture? Do you have an idea bank? Do you hold idea jams? How about an Innovation Gym where your staff can work on an idea and build a business plan? Do you empower your teams to make decisions, or are you a hierarchical, top-down structure? Perhaps you need to play some games.

To learn more about Innovation Games, try our workshop and blogs

1. Workshop: Designed to help organizations create a process of innovation, the SAMC Innovation Games Workshop will help you learn its methods and benefits in this informative workshop session. For access, click [here](#).

2. Blogs:

- [Why Are Innovation Games® In Such Demand?](#)
- [The Key To Innovation Games®? Everyone Gets To Share Ideas And Build New Solutions](#)
- [Innovation Games®: The Bridge To New, Previously Undiscovered Ideas And Innovations](#)
- [Why Are Innovation Games® Essential To Finding Big New Ideas?](#)

Ready to play some games? Let's talk!

As trained [Innovation Games](#) practitioners, we would love to tell you more about how this revolutionary approach to business growth could help your company “see, feel and think” in new ways and convert those new ideas into effective innovations. If you would like to schedule a workshop or training program, or just talk about how Innovation Games could help your business, please [contact us](#). We look forward to hearing from you.

About Andi and Andy Simon



Andrea (Andi) Simon Ph.D. and Andrew (Andy) Simon are [Simon Associates Management Consultants](#) partners. We bring to our clients a unique collaboration between our academic training and business experience. Our job is to help our clients and their teams “see, feel, and think” in new ways so they can change and adapt to fast-changing times. We specialize in [culture change](#), [leadership](#), [human development](#), and [women rethinking their journey](#). For a conversation on how we might

help your organization drive change, overcome challenges, and reach your potential for success, please [contact us](#).

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