

Generate simple new product ideas

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Successful large corporations stay ahead of their competition through a mix of product improvements and new product introductions. These large companies run several laboratories, staffed with armies of engineers and chemists hired just to make product improvements and new products a continuous reality. With much smaller budgets however, how do small businesses generate and introduce the new product ideas? Thankfully, these new ideas do not have to be extravagant. They do however have to deliver value to the customer. Below are some examples to get you thinking.

NEW SIZE: In Uganda, we can now purchase beverages in a variety of bottle sizes that were not available when those particular beverages were first introduced. Rwenzori Mineral Water for instance, is available in 18.7 litre, 1.5 litre and 500 millilitre bottles. The different sizes make it easy for a consumer to purchase the size that best suits their needs and budget. Could you offer different package sizes for different customer types?

PACKAGING CHANGE: Splash one litre fruit juices were first introduced in a tetra-pak that had to be cut open and could not be resealed or easily stored once open. Today Splash comes with a seal cap that is easy to twist off and on. Can you improve something about your product packaging to make it easier for customers to use or store your product?

PRODUCT SIMPLIFICATION: To make it easier for a younger generation to wear Uganda's complicated but beautiful traditional dress for women, the "gomesi," creative tailors introduced the "dot.com" version. This easy-to-wear rendition is actually a zip-up dress with folds that are permanently stitched into place. It comes with a knotted sash whose folds are also stitched into place, eliminating the need for the wearer to constantly readjust the folds of a dress made with 6 yards of fabric. The dot.com gomesi shortens the time it takes me to don a gomesi by no less than 15 minutes. Furthermore, I no longer need to look for an experienced gomesi-wearer to help me get it right. This much lighter version is also more comfortable to wear and so much easier to walk around in! How might you make your products or services less complicated to use?

NEW COLOUR / FLAVOUR / APPEARANCE: Beyond the traditional fruit juice flavours like Fruit Cocktail and Mango, Splash introduced Simply Hibi, a purple colored juice made from hibiscus flowers. The juice also apparently delivers health benefits to the drinker. What new combination of flavours or colours can you offer your customers?

Another example may be seen in the non-traditional manner that a Nairobi, Kenya restaurant I visited serves ugali (the local staple carbohydrate) and sukuma-wiki (green vegetables). The Sukuma-wiki is spread over a thin layer of ugali, rolled into an attractive, layered green and white roll and served in thick round slices. The interesting appearance alone will make customers want to order more. How might you change the manner in which your products / services are presented?

Challenge yourself and your staff to identify small changes that will separate you from the competition; and when the competition copies you, find another small change.