UNDERSTANDING, CLUSTERING, AND RANKING OPTIONS

BENNY HILL SORTING ("THIRTY FIVE")

A fast, energetic way to quickly choose the most interesting or popular options from a large group of possibilities. This is a more energetic interpretation of the game "Thirty Five" by Thiagi.[01]

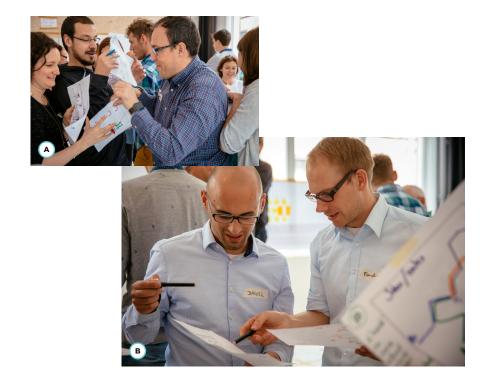|	
Duration	Participants will need to prepare their pieces of paper, unless they already have them in a suitable form. This might take a couple of minutes, depending on the complexity of the ideas. The game itself needs about 10 to 15 minutes, plus some time to check that the "winning" papers are useful and diverse.
Physical requirements	You need enough space for everyone to move about safely, but not so much space that the crowd spreads out; each person needs a pen and one piece of paper which has one sketch, idea, or insight on it.
Energy level	Very high
Facilitators	1, perhaps more for very large groups
Participants	12–300 people
Expected output	Ranking of all the ideas, insights, or other content

This tool will take a large number of items (one per person) and quickly rank them according to whatever criteria you decide. Use it after an ideation or pitching session to select the ideas or pitches which the group find most interesting, or use it at the start of a session to agree on priorities for the session, rules of cooperation, and so on.

Everyone stands in a group holding a piece of paper. They move through the group, exchanging papers randomly and repeatedly. Then, in pairs, they compare the two papers they're holding and assign points to each. The exercise repeats several times and the results for each paper are summed.
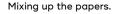
As well as producing a ranking of the items, this exercise also thoroughly mixes them, starts to establish co-ownership, and leaves the idea papers looking tired and used – which can be helpful if the group have trouble letting go of their ideas.

01 For many more, see *http://www.thiagi.com*.

Step–by–step guide

1 Ask each of the participants to prepare their pitch, sketch, idea, insight, or whatever on a piece of paper. It is vital that someone should be able to look at the paper and understand the idea in about 15 seconds – the papers must "speak for themselves." Most participants find this challenging, so ask them to test their papers with a neighbor or two and iterate if necessary.

2 Invite the group into a tight but physically safe space. Everyone should be holding their pitch or idea written in one sentence or as a sketch on one piece of paper. Everyone should have a fairly thick pen.

3 Explain steps 4–7 briefly. (Later, talk the participants through the first round or two).

4 With loud music playing ("Yakety Sax," the Benny Hill theme, is popular), have everyone move through the crowd, switching papers with everyone they meet. After a few seconds, stop the music.

A   Mixing up the papers.

B   Sharing out the points.

5 Everyone is now holding a pitch. They form into pairs, with the nearest person.

6 The pairs have one minute (or less) to compare the pitches on their two papers, and assign 7 "interesting-ness points"[01] between the two ideas. They can assign 7:0, 4:3, or anything in between. They must spend all the points, and they may not assign half-points. They should write the points allocated to each paper on the back of that paper.

7 Start the music again, and repeat the cycle – move around switching papers, stop and find a partner, assign 7 points, move around switching papers …

8 After about five cycles, stop the exercise after a mixing round. Everyone is now holding a (probably unfamiliar) piece of paper with an idea and a number of points written on it. They

add up the points, and can easily see which ideas most interest the group. These might not be the ones you decide to keep, but it is a good start.

9 If needed, use a method like a Floor Gallery or Coraling to form several work groups around these ideas.

Method notes

→ "Thirty Five" is the original name of this method. We use an alternative name that is more familiar to many in the service design community.

→ If participants find themselves holding their own papers, ask them, with a smile, to "deal with it."

→ If there is an uneven number of participants, you will always have one group of 3. Ask them to assign a total of 10 points between their 3 papers, with no paper getting more than 7 points. Remind them they will need to work especially fast.

→ Encourage the group, once they have assigned the points, to hold their papers in the air. This makes it easy to see who has finished.

→ Sometimes a paper will have a number missing on the back. This is usually because someone has forgotten to write down a "0." Don't worry about it.

→ Some might call this an "n=5 sequential cumulative random peer-pair zero-sum comparison" – however, we prefer "Benny Hill sorting."

→ To see one version of this activity in action, visit *http://bit.do/BennyHillSorting*. ◄

01 You might decide on other criteria, like customer impact or feasibility – but consider that it is very hard to judge these things from a quick sketch. A very general "importance" (or "rock-and-roll") scale is probably more useful.