



Experience The **Beauty** Of Ingenuity™



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Blue Perigee U Presents:
Tried & True But **New**

A Curious Thing

In some ways, innovation is a curious thing. And much of that mystique lies in the fact that it means different things depending upon the context. It can represent an improvement in a product, service, experience, procedure, policy or rule. It can be high-tech, low-tech or no tech. It can be revolutionary (i.e., ground-breaking) or evolutionary (i.e., incremental). It can involve creating something never seen before, improving something currently in existence or introducing an enhanced version of something that has disappeared from use.

As is clear, innovation does not have a singular definition. But that doesn't mean that the various types of innovation don't share common characteristics — because they do. For one thing, all innovation is an improvement on the status quo. Simply being new or different doesn't cut it. Unfortunately, many things in this world have been marketed as new or different but upon closer inspection it became obvious that they were not better than the status quo.

Secondly, if an innovation involves something that will be sold in the marketplace, it must be commercially viable. In other words, an idea may reflect great creativity and ingenuity but if it is too expensive to make or too difficult to reproduce it won't do anyone much good. To be commercially viable, an idea doesn't have to serve the mass market but it does have to serve some measurable and identifiable market whose size is beyond a handful of people.

And lastly, all pursuits of innovation are an extended work in progress. That doesn't mean you have to introduce new innovations every day, every week, every month or every year. But innovation is the byproduct of a complex creative process. And with all creative processes, you're bound to overlook some element that could have been improved. Moreover, things change. Better materials, processes or approaches come along all the time. And so, even after your innovation has been implemented, you must periodically review that innovation to see if there are improvements you may have missed or further improvements you can now make based on the current state-of-the-art.

Challenge And Reward

It goes without saying that innovation is a challenging pursuit. But that challenge is also what makes it so rewarding. There's nothing quite like the feeling of knowing that you introduced the world to some new and better idea that would not have existed but for you. Nothing like the feeling of knowing that your unique idea was

the spark for something that bettered people's lives. And when it comes to innovation, it all starts with the idea. The good idea. The problem is, good ideas don't grow on trees. They grow in people's minds. And so the obvious question is, "How do you grow a good idea?"

Overlooked Opportunity

Growing a good idea starts with your innovation strategy. In other words, the type of idea you grow depends on the type of innovation you pursue. As discussed above, innovation doesn't have one fixed definition; it exists as a spectrum of definitions or concepts that we detailed in the first paragraph of this article. But for the sake of simplicity, let's assume our innovation strategy revolves around a product.

In that case, you could create something revolutionary — like the airplane created by the Wright Brothers. Or you could make an incremental or evolutionary improvement to something that already exists, such as turning a two-slot toaster into a four-slot, "wide-mouth" toaster. But there is another option that is often overlooked. And that option revolves around the strategy of introducing an enhanced version of something that people no longer use.

I'm Back

As an example, consider the turntable (i.e., record player). Decades ago, it was an integral part of the music-listening experience. Even though 8-track tapes and then cassette tapes provided more music mobility, vinyl records played on a decent turntable were your go-to system when you wanted music quality.

But when CDs arrived on the scene, turntables were deemed to have outlived their usefulness. Digital was in, analog was out. MP3s added another nail to the coffin and turntables were essentially buried by the time streaming music began its rise. However, things are not always as they seem.

While digital offers benefits like effortless skipping of music tracks and the creation of personal playlists, it is not without its faults. Because digital music files are often compressed, they can produce music that sounds flatter, less full, and less realistic than their vinyl-record counterparts.

These deficiencies have not gone unnoticed. Indeed, to address these issues, turntables and vinyl records have returned with a vengeance. But they haven't

simply reappeared. Now they're far more advanced and include much better mechanicals, such as improved tonearms, platters, cartridges, and styluses. And consumers have responded to these improvements favorably. In fact, you can find better-than-average turntables and state-of-the-art vinyl records at your local big-box store. So, in this particular case, the appeal of re-introducing an enhanced version of something that had long ago disappeared has not been limited to audio connoisseurs. It has been appreciated by a far greater audience than that.

Old But Still Gold

The re-introduction of the turntable is a perfect example of using something old as a foundation for successful innovation. However, when using this type of innovation strategy, there is one thing you should keep in mind. And that is, you cannot simply re-introduce an improved version of something that used to be commonplace. Instead, if you are going to introduce an enhanced version of an old idea, it must not only be better than the original version of the idea, it must also be better than the current alternatives.

For instance, turntables are back in vogue not just because they are better than the turntables of yesteryear, they are back in vogue because they are also better in many ways than the cds, mp3s, and streaming music that replaced them.

Innovation Isn't Fashion

Although introducing an enhanced version of something that was common before it disappeared is one form of innovation, this type of innovation should be pursued sparingly. Indeed, if you pursue this type of innovation too often, you'll start to treat innovation like fashion. In the fashion industry, it's perfectly fine to repeatedly return to older styles that used to be in vogue. But if you do that too frequently with innovation — if you approach innovation as a trendy pursuit rather than a pursuit designed to push the state-of-the-art beyond its current limits — innovation can stagnate. What's more, treating innovation as fashion can breed resentment.

In fact, we've already experienced the "innovation-as-fashion" trap with laptops and mobile devices. In both cases, small displays were hyped, then large displays, then small displays, and so on. And because of this style-instead-of-substance approach, people eventually rebelled by keeping their current devices longer. So remember, even though the tried-and-true-but-new innovation strategy is perfectly legitimate, it should not be used as a long-term excuse to avoid innovating something brand new or improving upon something currently in use.