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Ways to Kill a Concept:
Why Most Ideas Get Shot Down™

By Michael Iva



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Everyone has ideas.
“Cogito Ergo Sum.”
(I think, therefore I am.)
~Rene Descartes

But then what? For some, it is enough to have the idea. But most people aren't satisfied by the mere act of thinking. Instead, they want to put those ideas to work. So, next they need to persuade someone else to embrace their newfound ideas in order for those ideas to be accepted and become a reality. Businesses persuade customers, bosses persuade employees, politicians persuade citizens, men persuade woman, mothers persuade fathers, wives persuade husbands, children persuade parents... or vice versa. In turn, corporations and governments and colleagues and friends and siblings persuade each other. And sometimes, people just have to convince themselves. At some level, every human is involved in the generation of ideas and then the solicitation of those ideas. Most of the time, somewhere along the way, a person's idea gets changed before their concept transaction is completed. Sometimes their concept lives and evolves, but more often it dies. Once a concept is conceived, persuading someone else to buy into that concept usually causes any of the following circumstances to happen (particularly in business, marketing & sales, the arts, science, government, and any entrepreneurial venture)...

1. The boss won't go for that.
2. The lawyers won't go for that.
3. The accountants won't go for that.
4. The client won't go for that.
5. The salespeople won't go for that.
6. The investors won't go for that.
7. So and so won't like it.
8. It's not us.
9. It won't fit into our system.
10. We're not ready for that yet.
11. I don't think it will work.
12. I don't understand.
13. Do you understand?
14. Will anyone understand?
15. What will they think of next?
16. It's politically incorrect.
17. It's too complicated.
18. It's too late for that now.

19. It's too expensive.
20. We'll lose money.
21. Why?
22. What!?
23. Who says?
24. Nobody will want that.
25. Where are you coming from?
26. It can't be done.
27. Have the committee review it.
28. Let's do more research.
29. Let's take a vote on it.
30. Let's play devil's advocate.
31. I've never heard of such a thing.
32. We've already tried that.
33. That's been done before.
34. It's not how we do things here.
35. We've never done anything like that.

36. We'll get back to you.
37. That's a subject for another meeting.
38. It creates more problems than it solves.
39. Sounds like too many problems.
40. That only solves some of the problems.
41. That's going to cause problems.
42. Here we go again.
43. That's unique, but . . .
44. Very interesting, but . . .
45. I understand, but . . .
46. I love it, but . . .
47. Great idea, but . . .
48. Yes, but . . .
49. Sounds simple, but . . .
50. But . . .
51. It's just not for us.
52. Try again.

53. That sucks.
54. Needs more pizzazz!
55. I don't like it.
56. Have you thought it through?
57. It won't sell.
58. Maybe next time.
59. Another day.
60. What are people going to say?
61. People will think we're nuts!
62. That's BS.
63. Be realistic.
64. How about this instead?
65. Get a grip!
66. Are you serious?
67. That turns me off!
68. The client is too liberal for that.
69. The client is too conservative for that.

70. What else do you have?
71. So!
72. So what?
73. Oh . . .
74. Oh?
75. Oh, really!
76. Get real, it's not feasible.
77. Sounds crazy!
78. Nobody does that.
79. Are you kidding me?
80. That's too off the wall.
81. You can't argue with success.
82. You can't fight City Hall.
83. We don't have time to do it.
84. Let's not reach beyond our grasp.
85. We're overextended already.
86. Let's wait 'til we see the numbers.

87. You're proposing what?
88. Let's not rock the boat.
89. Silence.
90. Laughter.
91. Boos.
92. Where did that come from?
93. I've got a better idea.
94. Hey, there's a recession going on.
95. We've never done anything like that.
96. The press will kill us.
97. That's not your decision to make.
98. We'll step on too many toes.
99. Just leave it to me; I'll take care of it.
100. You could lose your job for that . . .

WHAT PEOPLE REALLY MEAN TO SAY, BUT WOULD NEVER OPENLY ADMIT IS...
THEY ARE INNATELY AFRAID. AFRAID OF ANYTHING THAT IS NEW, IMPROVED, UNIQUE,
DIFFERENT AND/OR BETTER (ANYTHING THAT ACTS LIKE A CATALYST FOR CHANGE)
AND/OR THINGS THEY ARE NOT FAMILIAR WITH AND/OR ANYTHING THAT ANNOYS,
THREATENS, OR HARMS THEIR EGO, STATUS, POWER, OR LIVELIHOOD.

Because of their fear, it is so much easier for most people to say 'NO', rather than 'yes' to your concept. It is understandable that they want to fix it, or change it, or add to it, or subtract from it, or water it down, or make it less simple-direct-and-to-the-point, or put their own imprint on it, or try to make it more conventional, or more familiar, or more safe, or just keep the status quo. People are afraid of evolution, replacements, substitutes, anything that interferes with their past loyalties or modus operandi, or encroaches on their self, special or vested interest, or forces them to give up the bird in their hand for the (different) bird in the bush.

It is also reassuring for some people to take the daring part out of a concept and grind the rough edges, then sandpaper it to death. Oscar Wilde put it this way: "A concept that isn't dangerous is hardly worth calling a concept at all." It is often the shocking part, the frightening part, the unknown element, the element of risk, which makes a great new concept in the first place.

(Not only do these symptoms apply to the influence others have on your ideas, but also the influence you exert over your own ideas, when 'idea-suicide' caused by your own self-doubts and insecurities influence your decisions about your own ideas that guide and form your life).

WHEN IT COMES TO GENERATING GREAT CONCEPTS, AND THEN SELLING THOSE CONCEPTS TO WHOMEVER SO THEY ARE ACTED UPON AND HAPPEN, HERE ARE KEY INTERRELATED PRINCIPLES YOU NEED TO CONSIDER AND UTILIZE:

1. Everyone has to serve someone else to ultimately serve themselves. This principle manifests itself by what all buyers of ideas say to themselves, “So this idea of yours is going to do what for me? What’s in it for me to embrace your concept?” Which, in other words, means we all have to ‘give to get’ (which is just another way of expressing the universal principle of ‘cause and effect’).

2. The ideas that we ‘give’ (suggest) must be of interest to the receiver... before they notice, accept, or buy into our concept. The form and function of every concept...must translate into value and benefits for the receiver. Concepts must also feel right. They must be just, fair, and good for the receiver. Ultimately, the concept somehow has to make sense, by clearly demonstrating ‘the what’s in it for me’ benefit; so it is something the receiver can relate to. It’s all about addressing the receivers ‘self-interest.’

To attract and persuade someone to embrace your concept, there must also be something in your concept that provides the receiver with what they want or need. Something that will help them; it must have utility, solve a problem, answer a question, allow them to seek pleasure or avoid pain, help them hunt and gather, survive and prosper...or they will not buy into your concept, OR they will only buy into your concept once, AND never give a word-of-mouth endorsement about it to others under their influence.

Bottom line: 'creativity must be used for the concept's sake'...NOT 'creativity for your ego's sake.' All creativity must be focused to create a viable and workable solution that creates value for the receiver, NOT just an "ego-trip" for the idea creator. A concept that does not, or cannot, provide any of the aforementioned attributes is bound to die or be changed (until it can provide the receiver with something they want or need). This is one of the main reasons why the vast majority of most concepts die or end up being worthless.

3. Never forget that 'effective persuasion' is the KEY resolve required to translate a sensible concept into reality (to make it happen). Ideas and concepts do not sell themselves.

In one way or another, subtly or blatantly, in some way, shape, or form; 'everything has to be sold first...BEFORE it is purchased.' It takes 'effective persuasion' to translate any concept into reality (to make it happen). Thus, everyone who generates concepts must ALSO have a pre-determined 'why this' rationalization to help sell their concepts. PLUS, they have to learn how to 'sell their concepts themselves' or 'get a salesperson to sell their concepts'.

When you create or sell your creations, go with what you feel inside, your honest emotions. Try to capture and convey those emotions to your audience, so they can feel them too. Pure human-to-human feelings. This is what communicates and sells better than anything else. This is where the true magic lies. Done properly, there is no form of selling that is more powerful.

4. The single greatest enemy of concept approval is the lack of 'discernment' on the part of those who evaluate and approve concepts, simply because true discernment is the 'rarest talent' in the world. 'The ability to judge well, knowing what is good or right when one sees it' (being able to make insightful and discriminating value judgements between what is correct and what is not). This allows one to see and define 'value traits' in ideas, concepts, approaches, and the people who conceive them. . . it is something most people simply do not sense, and thus cannot fully understand or do.

5. Idea people must silently ‘care’ and ‘not care’ at the same time. You should care about what is important to you, but not care about what other people think, otherwise their fear and uncertainty will defeat you. This principle even applies to those who you are trying to sell your concept to, because they might have a sense of what they want, but not necessarily what they need.

6. It is easier to sell a sensible concept, than a bogus concept. The better your concept is, the easier it is to sell. The best way to create a great concept is by conceptualizing and utilizing ‘CREATIVITY’.

UNDERSTAND AND UTILIZE THESE CORE PRINCIPLES OF CREATIVITY:

- Creativity not used is wasted. Creativity partially used is partially wasted. Creativity fully used is success beyond measure.
- To be creative, you must be yourself. Who you are. Your personality. Your point of view.
- Creativity is an art, NOT a science.
- No just means, not right now.
- When something, anything, is done well enough to elevate it to an art form...that is being creative.
- Creativity is a lot like gunpowder. It is comprised of benign elements that do nothing, until they are combined. Making something that never existed, come to life.
- Inquiring into the who, what, where, when, and why...is part of how the creative process is conducted.
- The mind can regulate, govern, and control billions of things in our bodies at any point in time; but the mind can only think about one thing at a time. Discipline and focus your mind to be more creative.

- Identifying and defining the problem...helps to find the solution. Asking the right question... helps to reveal the correct answer. (This is a way of being creative, that anyone can do).
- You can't beat fun for having a good time. Fun can also be a serious pursuit, like being the basis of your vocation. People love fun. People who love what they do are highly motivated by their desire and enthusiasm; which will lead them to be more creative in bettering themselves and their output. When you do what you love, you love what you do; and it shows. You enjoy your job more and because of your job satisfaction, you are motivated to do more than others do and consequently do it better. Work, well done and done to the best of your ability, is one of the most gratifying of all human experiences, and the best of all environments to create and sell ideas in.
- Image is an important component in creating and selling a concept. Your concept is predicated on, 'what you say and how you say it.' The net effect of blending these two ingredients, is the image of your concept, it's sixth sense. It is one of the main things people remember about your concept and how they shape or form their opinion about it. Image creates the rapport you have with your audience. Image is the key to your concept's future success, and in the end...image is what your concept is in your audience's mind. The world is governed more by appearance than by reality...concepts are what they appear to be. Therefore, perception is everything. What your concept appears to be is more important than what it really is.
- Creativity's utility and versatility is universal. It works well under all conditions...good times, mediocre times, or bad times.
- There are two qualities that usually determine a creative persons potential...curiosity and determination. The curious learn, grow, and develop potential. The determined have the resolve to overcome the obstacles they encounter on their way to fulfilling their potential.
- Creativity is about having integrity.

- A key part of being creative is knowing when something is finished. Knowing when to stop.
- It is important to be a generalist, who specializes in creativity.
- Formulate and ask a lot of questions. Then learn how to listen, so you can hear the answers. Question. Listen. Learn. Understand.
- The secret of productivity in creativity is the elimination of waste. Keep it simple.
- Zig when others zag, or vice versa. It works. Any time the vast majority of people embrace a particular point of view, historically they have proven themselves to be incorrect, more often than not. Be different- yet relevant.
- Believe in magic. Understand that magic is an ingredient found in all great concepts.
- Try to become a creative person who understands human nature, psychology, sales, marketing, business, finance, distribution / logistics, and service. Be kind and nice along the way.
- When one person says something cannot be done, it is usually interrupted by another person who has already created a way to do it.
- Creative opportunities are often disguised as questions and problems.
- Creative concepts have a price-value relationship. It always has something to do with the money. Do not let that be your down fall.
- Everyone wonders if a concept will work, if it will do what it is suppose to do. They also worry about its life expectancy.
- Competition in the marketplace is not an act of aggression. You want to win and so do others...both of you have that right. Creativity is one of the last legal means of gaining unfair

advantage over your competition. It is always better to outsmart your competition than to outspend them or try to overpower them.

- It is amazing how creative and productive people can be when everyone gets a share of the credit.
- You stop being creative when you stop doing the things that made you creative in the first place.
- Being "Politically Correct", or "Me Too"...is NOT being creative.
- Nature gives all of its creatures something unique to allow them to hunt and gather, survive and prosper, seek pleasure and avoid pain. Mankind was given creativity.

7. Breakthroughs, innovation, and great ideas are often the children of mistakes. Do not worry about making mistakes, because: A. Mistakes happen. B. Accept mistakes as part of the process (learn from your mistakes and the mistakes of others). C. Try not to make the same mistake twice. D. Try not to make big mistakes. E. Then come to understand the true bottom line, those who make the fewest mistakes win.

8. Factor the following reality into ALL of your concepts and actions... people today are "time-poor" and "energy-drained". These lifestyle dynamics affect everyone's activities and decisions to some degree. No one has the time or energy to really get to know anything non-personal, thoroughly. Thus, people generally formulate their opinions and judgments by fleeting assessments from the sum total appearance (image) of the situation or topic at hand.

9. In most situations, when creating your concept and selling it, remember that being overly safe, is risky. The safer something is, the riskier it is. If you do not take a chance, you will not have one. "The greatest risk, is never taking one". You have to ultimately "risk failure and survive success". There is no such thing as safety and security in this world of ours anyway, so be calculated with your risks, but never be afraid to take them.

10. To paraphrase something the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer once noted about truth, which often applies to selling a great concept, “A great concept passes through three stages when it is new: First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident.”

11. When a lot of people are involved in making a decision, there is a greater likelihood for CONFORMITY. You have to have creative-control over your concept to create the possibility that it can happen. That allows you to make it work. Figure out how to control your concept to be able to determine it’s destiny.

12. Utilize any form of LEVERAGE you can to help sell your concept. Such things as, but not limited to:

- Your experience, relevant case histories, portfolio samples, examples, or any past success; anything that says, ‘you did it once, you can probably do it again.’
- Your education / training, talent, skill, vision, aptitude, enthusiasm, or understanding; anything that says, ‘because of this, there is a good chance of doing that.’
- Network, use your contacts to help you make a connection.
- Parlay off the notion that someone is going to do this soon, it might as well be us.
- Everything constructive and positive that builds credibility, believability, to ESTABLISH TRUST, the bottomline and most important element needed to finally make the sale.

13. In ALL cases, have the correct mindset to put yourself in a position, to give yourself an opportunity to prevail. You MUST be hopeful and have faith and belief in your concept. If you don’t, who will? It also helps to have a motivational mental thrust that ‘you have something to prove’ to someone, or an ‘I told you so,’ or ‘I’ll show you’ type attitude, fueling your forward movement.

Understand that the process takes time to happen and thus creativity and perfection and the sell through, do NOT all happen at the same time. Along the way you WILL need resolve (determination, drive, desire, discipline, consistency, persistence, and resiliency) to do whatever it takes, whatever is necessary, knowing that there is always a way as long as you never quit or never give up. You must start with a sensible concept that imparts value, worth, and benefit; so as to make sense to whomever. (In business situations, it should make sense to a big enough segment of a big enough market to make it feasible to produce or execute). Without this type of action component nothing will happen. Without this type of action component your concept is neutered. Don't just think about it. . . do it.

14. In my world of new product development and/or introductions, I know there are no maps to success, only guides. If there were maps to success, every new product launch would be a success...well, they're not. 8 out of 10 new products fail immediately. Of the two that survive, one will fail in the first three years. So the moral of the story is, "if you do not know where you need to go, many paths will take you there"...unless you're shown the way, by the right guide.

For a reality check and inspiration and motivation, always remember these four irrefutable principles pertaining to sensible concepts; before you try to kill a concept ...or... when you have a concept you need to create for and sell to someone else:

- A. Everything in the world that is man-made owes its existence to the concept it began as.
- B. Concepts: predict, program, and determine your reality and EVEN your future.
- C. Concepts are your window to the world.
- D. Concepts are where ALL creativity, innovation, progress, products, services, and profits come from.

Sensible concepts are far too important to be taken lightly, or to die prematurely.

AN ODE TO CONCEPTUALIZATION:

(There is nothing like your first love, or the moment a great idea comes to you) . . .

Pencil poised,

gazing into space,

listening to my thoughts;

waiting to hear

what they have to say.

Soul searching,

that is soul soothing.

A special process

of self examination

and introspection.

Thinking of thoughts

thought about already,

or waiting to be thought.

As I think about these thoughts,

I am the thoughts

I am thinking.
The more I think,
the more I find.
The more I uncover,
the more there is to discover.
Reviewing this world within,
to help reveal the world outside.
My mind is a question mark,
so as to find the correct answer.
My mind examines and defines the problem,
so as to discover the solution.
Sooner or later...
a vision
unencumbered by sight,
suddenly appears.
My mind expands,
only to converge.

Finally focused,
idea found.
The abstract made real.
The random organized.
Putting my finger on something
that cannot normally be touched.
Quickly capture the thought
before it disappears
as fast as it materialized.
Paper remembers,
I forget.
Do you know this feeling,
that magical moment
when fantasy meets reality?
When what could be, becomes what is..
When the crystallization of a concept occurs.
Making the invisible, seen.

Making the unknowing, known.

Making the unworkable, workable.

The externalization of thought.

Thinking things into existence.

Creating a tangible from the abstract.

Conceptualization,

when an idea is first conceived.

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If you create or evaluate ideas, read this manifesto carefully three times. Then save it and use it as a checklist guide every time you are working on a concept. It will help you remember the fundamental principles of idea generation and concept solicitation. I even use it myself, because it works.

An old and righteous Chinese proverb says, "When someone shares something of value with you and you benefit from it, you have a moral obligation to then, share it with others so they may benefit too." Please share my concept about generating and selling concepts with everyone you know (particularly business people, marketing and sales associates, scientists, artists of any type, inventors, and entrepreneurs) who have ever had an idea that got shot down or killed by someone who did not quite understand it.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Iva is President/Creative Director of Qually & Company, Inc and QuContent. An internationally renown New Product Launch Specialist, Designer, Writer, Lecturer, Professor, and Marketing Expert who has helped to successfully position, reposition, or launch 128 new products and services (more than any other 'individual' practitioner in the U.S.A.), generating countless billions in profitable sales for major corporations around the world. Along the way, he has won over 600 awards for creativity from his industry and peers, and holds 4 US patents on his own new products. Iva is a professional creative person, who either launches and sells new product concepts of others OR generates new products and launches them for his own company. For more essays and insights, see Iva's daily weblogs at <http://adholes.com> or at his website <http://www.quallycompany.com>. Contact Michael at iva@quallycompany.com and ivamichael@hotmail.com

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