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Creating Innovative Products and Services

The FORTH Innovation Method

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GOWER

Foreword

Innovation is crucial to all organisations, whether large or small, new or established. It is of the utmost importance that you keep your product and service portfolio up to date and appropriate, as this will have a stimulating effect on your employees. By challenging them to consider new products or market combinations, you stimulate their creativity and extend their responsibility. Innovation is not an option. If you do not innovate, it leads to stagnation whereby good employees may leave the company and before you realise it, it is the beginning of the end.

Sanoma Publishers has a good track record in the marketing of magazines in the Netherlands. Well-known brand names such as *Libelle*, *Margriet*, *Viva*, *VTWonen*, *Donald Duck* and *Story* belong to the cultural heritage of the Netherlands. However, the world is changing rapidly and with it the behaviour of not only consumers but also advertisers. Anticipation of these changes can only occur if you innovate or purchase. At Sanoma we have chosen to do both. With regards to the Digital Media we have strengthened our position on the market through take-overs and purchasing. Good examples of this are Startpagina, Nu, Kieskeurig and SchoolBANK. Being in the top position, both on and offline, is great, but to stay in this position we must continue to be creative and innovative. The management is therefore obliged not only to keep this position but also to extend and develop it.

Innovation is often associated with 'totally new', because doing something new seems more exciting and should you succeed you can write history, even if only within your own company. However, the chance of this happening is small. Which company has created innovation through the selling of books online? Amazon.com? Wrong. Amazon.com is a good example of the current misconception that you have to be a *fast mover* in order to be profitable. However, if you are quick enough to consolidate your innovations and then to upgrade them, you can earn much more. Markides and Gerski describe it as *being fast second*.

Innovation of an existing brand and its position on the market is equally important. For this reason Sandra Dol, publisher of women's magazines at Sanoma, discussed the position of the magazines *Libelle* and *Margriet* after 2015 with me. Both brands will then be more than 75 years old and will undeniably still hold their strong position on the market. But we wanted more. During the past ten years both brands were strengthened by the so-called 'line and brand extension', which included not only books, agendas and thematic specials, but also duvet covers and bicycles. Great, but nothing new or pioneering apart from the *Libelle* Summer Week and the *Margriet* Winterfair, two very successful and profitable events.

Sandra and I consider ourselves stewards of these brand names and it is our task to initiate ideas from which our successors will be able to profit. This is how we came into contact with Gijs van Wulfen (whom we already knew) and his FORTH innovation method. We have implemented this technique and I must admit that it was an exciting and very successful course. At this very moment there are three detailed Mini Business Cases completed, which together are worth an income of €7.3 million within three years after their introduction. All three of the new concepts are innovative, suitable to the brands and have earned credibility with our clients. The next step is to decide which concept(s) we are going to develop in greater detail before launching it.

Some aspects have caught my attention during the FORTH journey:

- Firstly, the fantastic enthusiasm and drive this process creates within the participants.
- Secondly, the thoroughness of the process. In general people are creative and can produce 12 new concepts per hour, flawlessly. Yet the postponing of both the brainstorming session as well as the giving of your opinion, together with the will not only to understand the resistance of the customer but also to gain a deeper insight into new markets, were extremely useful. I am convinced that it led to improved and achievable concepts without affecting the ambition or the drive of the team.
- Thirdly, the necessity of a strong project management team, as during the process you experience every emotion from euphoria to the deepest depression and then back again.
- Finally, the necessity of an extended team, which includes the board of directors, even if only for support during the journey.

I highly recommend the FORTH innovation method. When you apply it well, it becomes a beautiful voyage with incredible discoveries and great advantages. I wish you a successful journey.

Henk Scheenstra
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