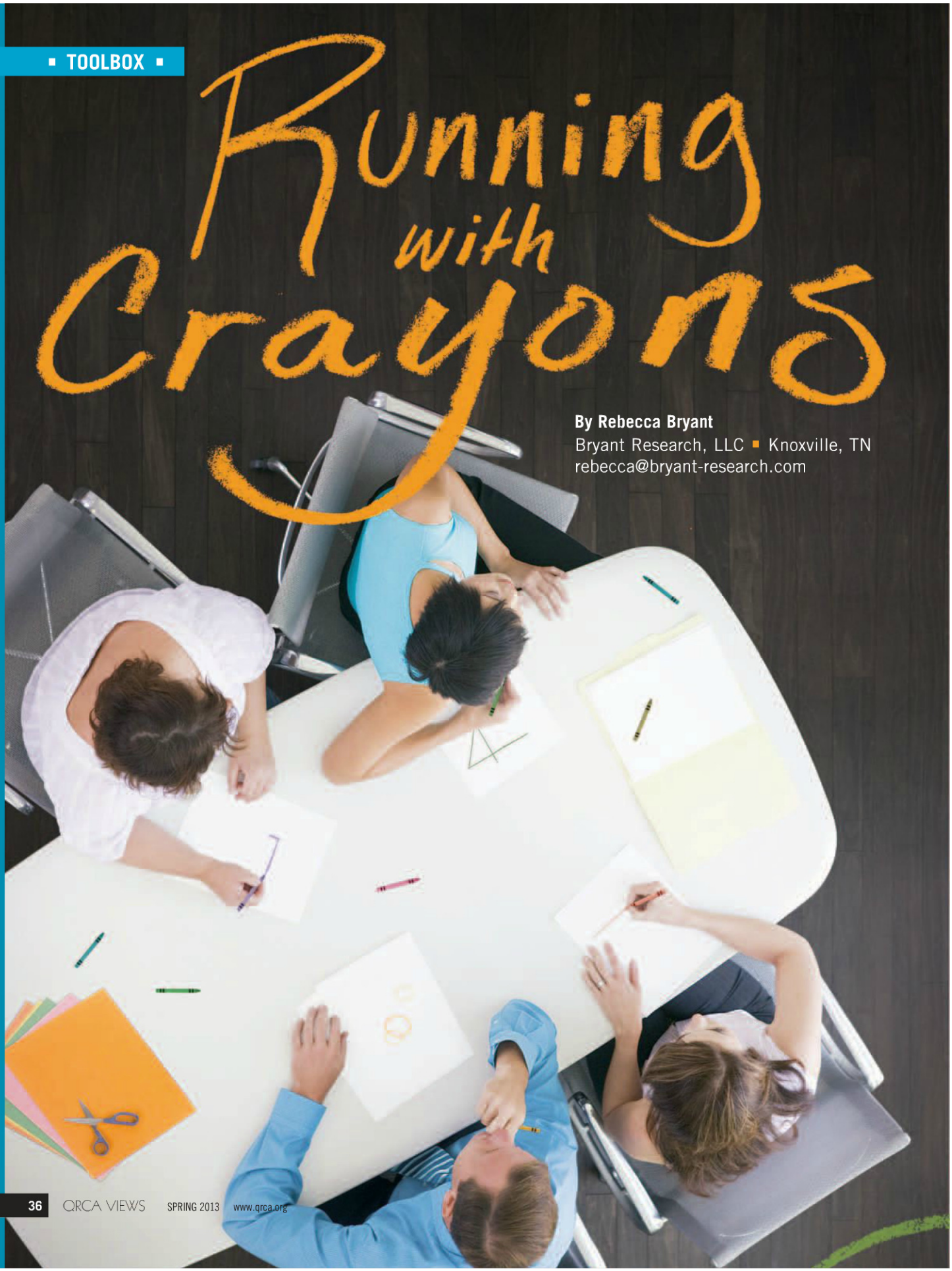
Running with Crayons

By Rebecca Bryant
Bryant Research, LLC ▪ Knoxville, TN
rebecca@bryant-research.com



Based on a challenging client directive, my firm developed a process to generate new-product ideas, integrating individual and social creativity by using online interviews, kindergarten art supplies and traditional focus groups. Easily replicable, this process may be useful for one of your own future qualitative projects.

The Basic Premise

Everyone is creative. Everyone.

By extension, every consumer brings uniquely creative points of view to the research process. The difference between those termed "creative" and those labeled as not-quite-so-gifted is often two-fold: having the ability to capture ideas, and having a safe and supportive context where they can explore their ideas with others.

Individual and Social Creativity Defined

Individual creativity: a solitary endeavor that draws on a single person's experiences, intuition and imagination to ultimately yield novel vision or ideas.

Social creativity: sharing individuals' ideas in a group context where others can serve as a sounding board and contribute their own perspectives, effectively building on, shaping and reshaping ideas.

> "Creativity does not happen inside people's heads, but in the interaction between a person's thoughts and a socio-cultural context."
> *Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 1996*

Consumers' creativity can flourish when individuals come together in a social context that supports the creative process. Gerhard Fischer notes that "a tension exists between creativity and organization. A defining characteristic of social creativity is that it transcends individual creativity and thus requires some form of organization." This is where qualitative researchers really add value to the process. We know how to organize processes where individuals can share their thoughts with others.

Challenges that Spurred Our Process

Our process evolved in the context of an unbudgeted mandate. Our client needed to fill the product pipeline, yesterday. We had a 45- to 60-day window to design a process, recruit respondents and complete the research. Importantly, the research needed to generate both near-term, easy-to-execute ideas as well as future-market ideas.

The company had no formal new-product development process. Whatever we did, it had to be replicable. We were charged with creating a standard.

Our client also had a long, confident and frankly successful history of "how things have always been done." It is hard to argue with success. Recent focus groups, however, had shown that some of the consumer truths driving product development were inaccurate. So, it was extremely important to design the work in a way that gave key marketing staff a front-seat role in the process so that they could hear, see and internalize consumer points of view.

Structuring the Marketing Team for Maximum Benefit

During the data-collection process, members of the marketing staff were given specific tasks designed both to facilitate the research and to focus back-room attention. They were also directed to take notes in a very specific way. Each idea that they heard from participants was recorded on a separate note card, making it much easier to sort ideas into categories after the sessions. This also facilitated bucketing-related content that surfaced (e.g., product positioning and marketing ideas). Observers also were encouraged to note their own ideas on the cards, giving note-takers the opportunity to springboard from consumers' ideas in real time.

Screening for "Creative Consumers"

The working assumption that everyone is creative streamlined the screening process. The question then became not so much who was creative, but how to get the right type of problem solver.

We thought about the four main types of problem solvers and used this to structure a key screen-out question.

- The Now-Let-Me-Understand-This-Better Folks — those who ask a lot of questions.
- The "What Iffers" — those who like to come up with lots of ideas.
- The Here's-How-It-Would-Work People — those who like to work on the "how-to" details of a solution.
- The Executives — those who enjoy executing the solution.

To be included in our research, a respondent had to self-identify as a "What Iffer." However, we decided that those who only saw themselves as Executives would not be appropriate at this stage of the process. The judgment here was that for the person whose native and only self-identified approach to problem solving would be to take charge of managing the solution, the amount of ambiguity in the research design would prove frustrating. The following question is the one used in the screener to populate the sessions.

For each one, tell me if each is very true, somewhat true or not usually true about how you, personally, approach problem-solving.

__ I like to ask a lot of questions to clarify the issue so that the problem can be solved.

Very True *Somewhat True* *Not Usually True*

__ I like to come up with a lot of ideas about how to solve the problem.

Very True *Somewhat True* *Not Usually True*

[THANK, TERMINATE AND TALLY IF THE RESPONDENT SAYS "NOT USUALLY TRUE."]

__ I like to work on developing the solutions that will work.

Very True *Somewhat True* *Not Usually True*

__ I like to implement the solutions once those have been identified

Very True *Somewhat True* *Not Usually True*

[THANK, TERMINATE AND TALLY IF THIS IS THE ONLY APPROACH THAT THE PARTICIPANT INDICATES IS TRUE.]

Overview of the Research Design

Figure 1.

ONLINE IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS
(focused on individual creativity)

- 36 adults — Each was the primary category purchaser for himself/herself.
- 12 of the 36 adults were also the primary category purchaser for a child under age 13.
- Each participant was involved in 3 days of asynchronous, online depth interviews.

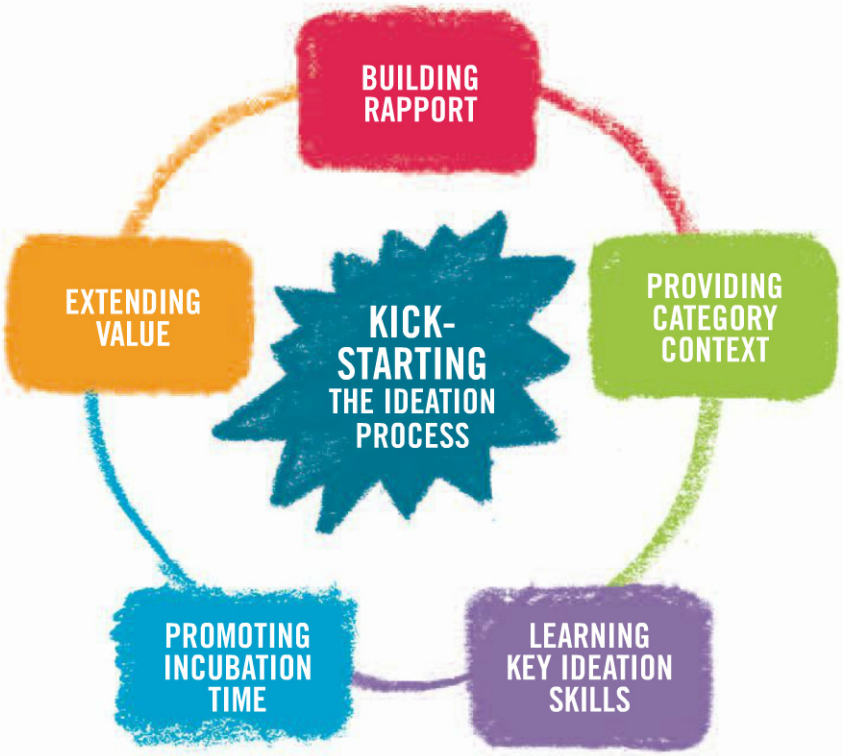
IN-PERSON SESSIONS
(mix of individual and social creativity)

- Same 36 participants, divided into 6 mini-groups — 4 with adult purchasers only and 2 with adult and child purchasers.
- Each 3-hour session included 1.5 hours of ideation and 1.5 hours of prototype building and review.

Kick-Starting the Ideation Process

To kick-start the ideation process, we used three days of online one-on-one interviews. As Figure 2 shows, the online environment was selected to accomplish multiple objectives.

Figure 2.



Building Rapport and Confidence

The online interviews provided a time for the researcher to establish a rapport with each participant. It also helped to:

- Build a common understanding of purpose.
- Establish the safe environment so essential to promoting free-flowing ideation.
- Prepare participants so that they came to the subsequent face-to-face session ready to work.

On Day 1, participants were welcomed, and the online script immediately reinforced the expectation that each of them was creative. The script then provided specific and simple instructions about how to start capturing ideas. A snippet of the Day 1 online script follows.

Research shows that everyone is creative. Everyone. The biggest difference between those who come up with a lot of new ideas and those who don't is often (1) practice and (2) having a way to capture the ideas when they surface.

So, take a piece of paper, and at the top, write down this:

My ideas for new ways to _____ [fill in, based on your client's objectives]

For the next three days, keep this piece of paper and a pen with you. Place it by your bed before you go to sleep, and read it before going to bed at night. As ideas occur to you, jot them down. Remember, there are no bad ideas. All ideas present possibilities. Avoid second-guessing yourself. The less critical you are of your ideas, the more ideas you will have.

Providing a Category Context

Also on Day 1, each participant received a Category Overview Document that showed the different types of existing products in the category. Even though participants were screened for selected product-purchase and product-use behaviors, category information was provided to:

- Make sure that each participant had the same information.
- Avoid "inventing" an existing product.
- Provide a springboard for the online ideation.

Learning Key Ideation Skills

In addition to having respondents use the notepaper for capturing ideas, we started using Michalko's SCAMPER online. Michael Michalko developed a series of "idea-spurring questions," and Bob Eberle arranged these into the following mnemonic. SCAMPER outlines key question areas that spur thinking about a product, process or service differently. The questions are:

- Can you **S**ubstitute something?
- Can you **C**ombine it with something else?
- Can you **A**dapt something to it?
- Can you **M**odify or Magnify it?
- Can you **P**ut it to some other use?
- Can you **E**liminate something?
- Can you **R**everse or **R**earrange it?

In using SCAMPER, it is important to probe, asking "how-can" and "what-else-might-work" questions. In our work, we started by instructing participants to look at the Category Overview Document and then note what products they would combine to create a new product that they would like even better than what they were already using.

Promoting Incubation Time

Individual creativity benefits from think time. People generate more ideas when they have time to think about ideas and to process problems subconsciously. The creative process benefits from literally "sleeping on it."

Our research design purposely incorporated incubation time and provided participants guidance regarding how to capture ideas using the notepaper. This maximized the time spent online and helped prepare participants for their face-to-face session.

Extending Value

The online bulletin board also presented the opportunity for parents to include children in the ideation process. Parents were encouraged to interact with their children about the category and to think about product ideas for their children as well as themselves. So, even though the budget would not accommodate groups with children, we did start the conversation.

Creating a Context for Social Creativity

After participating in the online sessions board, participants came to a focus group facility for a three-hour focus group. This research design employed six mini groups, with six participants in each group. Groups were divided into two, one-and-a-half-hour sessions. The first hour and a half was used to continue the ideation started online. An outline of the face-to-face session follows, along with the purpose and rationale for each activity.

Icebreaker

Purpose: to provide quick activities that everyone can complete successfully.
Rationale: Gives participants' time to start forming as a group in a fun and non-threatening way, and kick-starts the group process.

Forness® *Thinking — language that lets us communicate what we are for, without shutting down others' ideas*

Purpose: to provide construct, rationale and language for participants (and the back-room team) to use that will spur ideation and keep negative thinking from slowing the process.
Rationale: to establish a social context that both promotes ideation and builds on all kinds of ideas.
(I learned the ***Forness®* Thinking** approach from Ideas to Go in Minneapolis, Minnesota.)

To generate *Forness®* Thinking, USE THIS EXERCISE:

1

Have participants divide into pairs. Instruct participants to plan a trip with their partner by volleying ideas back and forth and saying "Yes, and…" as they add ideas to the trip plan.

- For example, your partner might say, "I think we could go to the beach."
- You might say, "Yes, and we could find great seafood restaurants."

2

Avoid any negative reactions or statements. Let the role-playing go for a minute or two. Then, get participants to share:

- How many ideas they generated.
- What it felt like to work in this manner.

3

Repeat the role-playing, but this time instruct participants to precede their suggestions with, "Yes, but…" as they add to their partner's ideas. Let the role-playing go for a minute or two. Then, get participants to share:

- How many ideas they generated this time
- What this approach felt like.

Typically, participants produce notably fewer ideas, and they comment on how criticized and even adversarial the interaction feels when their partner precedes everything with, "Yes, but…"

4

All participants now have a shared experience in which they understand the importance that language plays in the success of the session. Encourage participants to do the following:

- Talk in terms of what they are looking for by saying, "I wish… ."
- Look for solutions by asking, "How can we… ?"

Sharing of Personal Product Experience

Purpose: to start creating a context of sharing focused on the product category, which requires low vulnerability.

Rationale: fairly non-threatening way for participants to start to reinforce the group experience as safe.

Exercises Used to Nurture Social Creativity

Purpose: to provide participants with the opportunity to manipulate various aspects of the current product (or service) so that they can see new possibilities.

Rationale: Most new things spring from what already exists. This series of activities gives consumers ways that they can look at existing products and think of new ideas.

In these sessions, we used SCAMPER, "Building on That" and "Slice and Dice" exercises. "Building on That" in these sessions was a simple and exhaustive round robin where participants were instructed to quickly add an idea to what others said. Figure 3 shows the worksheet used for "Slice and Dice." After participants filled in the worksheet, putting a different aspect of the product in each box, we used the "cell addresses" to refer them to one or more product characteristic.

Figure 3. "Slice and Dice" worksheet instructions: write the different attributes of this product in each of the squares below, being sure to write only one characteristic per block. (The example below shows how a participant might start to fill a "Slice and Dice" worksheet about cell phones.)

	1	2	3	4
A	Small	Black	Has number keys	Has letter keys
B	Rings	Lights up	Personal	Stores pictures
C	Find restaurants	Fits in purse		
D				

The worksheet is a useful tool to deconstruct the product so that participants have a concrete springboard for constructing something new. It works equally well for deconstructing (or pulling apart) different aspects of a process or service. The idea is to deconstruct something into its many different parts and to then look for new ways to put it back together.

For example, the moderator might instruct individuals in the group to think of as many alternatives to what they have in square 1A as they possibly can. The quick list that follows illustrates other ways to use the worksheet. NOTE: Many of these cues come directly from SCAMPER.

- Quickly combine the aspects in squares 3C and 2D to create a new product (or service or process).
- What if the product did not include the aspect in square B4? How could this improve the product?
- Look at the aspect in square 3B. What if the "new product" had more of this?
- Make the aspect in square 2D the bottom of the product (or last step in the process). What happens?

Creating Ideas for the Shelf

After the first half of the session, participants were given a 10-minute break and re-entered the focus group room to sit at a table filled with kindergarten art supplies. We intentionally chose kindergarten art supplies for several reasons, including:

- Wide availability.
- Familiarity — most everyone knows how to use blunt-ended scissors, crayons, construction paper and glue sticks.
- Ease of use — to paraphrase a bit, "Most everything I needed to know about creating art, I learned in kindergarten."

We started the second half of the session with an individual pen-and-paper exercise, and then moved to making product prototypes.

Taking Stock — a pen-and-paper exercise

Purpose: to provide participants with the opportunity to sift back through the session, evaluate the ideas and

note what each participant found most appealing and why.

Rationale: gives participants the chance to get grounded by thinking, evaluating and internalizing information from others.

Instructions in the moderator guide read in part: Thinking back over our group's conversation, write down at least two product ideas that you personally would buy. Using this worksheet, describe each idea in detail. Then, using the supplies you see here, make a prototype.

It is important at this point for participants to have individual think time, so moderators need to instruct participants that the room will be quiet for them to focus on their individual ideas. Moderators could turn on music, as long as it is background music. In our sessions, we choose quiet mood music.

Making Prototypes

Purpose: to give participants the opportunity to make a physical representation of their product idea(s).

Rationale: provides each participant with individual "creative" time and the opportunity to turn their ideas into tangible product idea(s).

As mentioned earlier, we chose to provide simple kindergarten art supplies. We also included materials similar to product-parts descriptions that had been captured during the online portion of the work.

Reviewing Prototypes

Purposes: to showcase each participant's creation, to capture the product description (as well as the participant's rationales for the product idea) and to get additional ideas from other group members.

Rationale: logical culmination activity that celebrated each invention, provided opportunity for social creativity and produced a three-dimensional record of the product, the reason(s) the product is of value and consumer positioning statements.

Instructions for this portion of the groups were straight forward and akin to "show and tell" in the classroom. Each participant showed his or her product to the group, while explaining its materials, functionality and features. Then, he or she took questions from others, including

NEW from Paramount Market Publishing, Inc.

STIR IT UP! Recipes for Robust Insights & Red Hot Ideas

Laurie Tema-Lyn

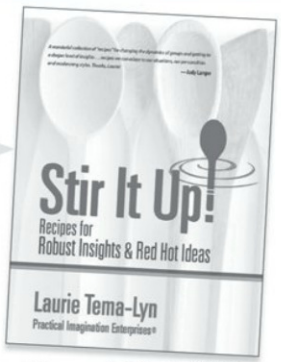
Laurie's "cookbook" is a gift, destined to become a resource for novices as well as seasoned chefs in the art of facilitating focus groups, meetings, or events.

—Patricia Sunderland, Practica Group LLC

Meet Laurie Tema-Lyn, and other PMP authors at the QRCA annual conference. To see all PMP qualitative research titles, go to:

www.paramountbooks.com

PMP **888-787-8100**



140 pp., paperback, illustrated $24.95

market research dallas

SHHHH ..

MARKET RESEARCH'S

BEST KEPT SECRET .....

3 SEPARATE ROOMS WITH SPACIOUS CLIENT FACILITIES

LOCAL, STATE AND NATIONAL PROJECT SCOPE

MULTICULTURAL PROJECT CAPABILITIES

IN-HOUSE RECRUITING

PHONE: 972.239.5382 • TOLL FREE: 866.830.5382

• www.marketresearchdallas.com

• EMAIL: mail@marketresearchdallas.com

the moderator. Finally, the participant was instructed to invite others to quickly build on the idea.

Groups concluded with each participant making a personal recommendation to the manufacturer. This underscored the importance of each participant's point of view and provided a concise summary of individual and social creativity, as well as a constructive activity for the "false close" so that the moderator could confer with client before the end of group.

The Result?

The process yielded 231 discreet product ideas — 187 for adults and 44 for children. These were boiled down to 45 concepts, 30 of which went on to concept testing. As an added bonus, the client also received ideas that impacted sales distribution, marketing positioning and messaging.

Creativity WORDS OF WISDOM

"Creativity is contagious. Pass it on."
Albert Einstein

"You can't use up creativity. The more you use, the more you have."
Maya Angelou

"Creativity comes from trust. Trust your instincts. And never hope more than you work."
Rita Mae Brown

"Don't think. Thinking is the enemy of creativity. It's self-conscious, and anything self-conscious is lousy. You can't try to do things. You simply must do things."
Ray Bradbury