

# Think Different (But Be Relevant)

How to grow a bigger brain in 10 easy steps, Part 4

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What do fragrances and chocolate have in common? Aside from making great girlfriend and mom gifts, they are among the product categories that have been touched by entrepreneurial innovation and differentiation. [Bond No 9](#) is a New York-based fragrance brand that is able to charge as much as \$395 for a bottle of scent because they have infused the category with extra style. The packaging, the sales process, and the website all prompt the consumer to believe that she is a member of an exclusive and hip club of scented people.

Principles of “breakthrough branding” apply to sweets as well. Sarah Endline, Chief Rioter of [sweetriot](#) developed a line of 100% dark cacao nibs covered in dark chocolate (and other cacao products). They come in cool little packages and the company’s website is spirited and engaging. Of note is that both brands seem to subscribe to the “honey I shrunk the product” philosophy of marketing. Offering consumers a trial or miniature size of products can be a great way to attract new buyers at a lower price point. And both brands are consistent, engaging communicators. They have built their databases over time and reach out regularly to their fans and prospects with compelling messages - but they never sell too hard or SPAM their lists.

So, how do you come up with the next big (or little) idea for your own product line or service?

- Break it down and listen. Get to the essence of your buyers’ or prospects’ needs, wants, and hot buttons. Do simple research and study the competition.
- Make time for brainstorming. Involve people from outside your field and, especially in the early stages; do not allow practical realities to shut down great ideas. Use fun exercises like asking each team member to bring a product or ad that he was “wowed” by due to its simple and powerful way of differentiating a commodity product. (And get out of your office!)
- Stay true to and heed your customers’ needs. Do not innovate simply for the sake of being different or standing apart from the crowd.
- Keep the product... change the offer. You do not necessarily need to change your product or service to differentiate. Pricing, promotion, and charity tie-ins can all help you stand out. And remember, if you do not have a great product to start with, clever packaging and offers will not help sales and loyalty in the long run.
- Launch and sell well. Make sure your uniqueness is clear to the customer and that your marketing is consistent with your brand, product, or service.

These principles apply to B-to-B marketing and service categories as well as consumer marketing. Every interaction with a client can enjoy its own special “packaging” even if your offer is neither fragrant nor sweet. Customer service policies and guarantees, package pricing, sustainable (green) practices, and seasonal offers can all be ways of standing apart from your competitors. Ask yourself at least once a month - what are we doing to be different in a meaningful and relevant way?

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