

SEE THE OLD AS NEW

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All of us get into a rut from time to time. Often, it's the competition or changes in our marketplace that force us to adapt or shift our ways of thinking. Anyone just starting to conduct business on the Internet can attest to this. Pressure to change is so constant that it's almost refreshing to hold onto the familiar parts of our work or business much like we do that old comfortable pair of shoes we still keep in the closet.

Our standard operating procedures or bread and butter products or services can create an illusion of security. Ironically, the best innovations can come from this same source if we are willing to see the old as if it were new.

Take 1-800-FLOWERS as an example. For long distance floral delivery, FTD and its participating local florists were the only game in town. You never really knew what your gift arrangement would look like and the recipient would often be reluctant to say anything negative. Then one day someone said, why not look at distributing flowers in a whole new way? Why not show pictures of exactly what the floral arrangements look like and let people order direct? Offering a unique mix of consistency and convenience to its customers, 1-800-FLOWERS was born.

Another way that you can change your perspective on old data is by booting up your computer. Technology has made it possible for even small businesses and individuals to track customer demographics and conduct advanced customer research. You can go data mining by looking at routine data found in your accounting program, contact-management files and other sources. High powered desktop technology and the latest software packages offer new options to ferret out information you didn't think you had. Want to develop exclusive promotions or analyze customer-buying patterns? Try putting a new spin on routine data.

If you were a consultant to yourself, would you view your work, products or services differently? What do your customers want that they aren't receiving? What are some ideas to improve your products or services that your customers haven't even thought of yet? As you read these questions, you might be saying, this costs money!

Concern or fear keeps people from brainstorming. Wonderful ideas don't surface because self-imposed barriers arrest the creative process. Suspend judgment for a moment and ask yourself, if resources were not an issue, what could I/we offer to deliver a unique mix of value to our customers?

Seeing the old as if it were new can bring energy, excitement and profits to your work. If you're feeling stuck, build in time to get the creative juices flowing. Visit other

businesses different from your own; read books or magazines outside your industry; talk with current and prospective customers; participate in forums where diverse opinions abound, or just relax and give yourself the gift of unstructured thinking time.