Conducting a Brainstorming Exercise

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In this chapter, we will learn the following to World Class Web standards:

1. Bringing About New Ideas
2. Create Primary Categories Branching from the Subject

Bringing About New Ideas

Periodically, individuals in the creative professions of architecture, graphics and engineering need to cultivate new ideas. There are certain times or triggers during the work year that cause us to schedule an conference dedicated to inspire innovation. One time during the fiscal year is when design department key personnel develop budgets and our bosses require us to propose new products and procedures. Other instances are when we bid on or win contracts that necessitate the department to produce outline drawings, programs or models of new systems for the first time. Even during emergencies such as an unexpected product failure can cause an individual or a group to band together and brainstorm.

One technique to formulate those thoughts is by using a well-practiced brainstorming technique. The method we are about to learn can be done individually or in a group setting. We should reserve a conference room or any other quiet out of the way location for an extended period and there should not be any interruptions once the session begins. We need a whiteboard with a large set of multi colored markers. If we do not have a marking surface on the wall, we need two or more easels with full packs of chart paper. Have tape available so that we can hang finished pieces of chart paper on the wall. Have smaller notepads at attendees' seats to promote doodling. We should plan to have refreshments such as water, juice and coffee. Introduce thinking food like Twizzlers, carrot sticks or long pretzels. Do not serve snacks that will make the members lethargic such heavy foods.

We should record the notions brought out in the session as quickly as uttered. Every idea is important. If the staff members who are recording do not know where to place the comment, then we can ask the promoter of the idea to fully explain their assertion so we can organize the information as best as we can. We will have a brainstorming leader to aid the interaction, but our facilitator needs to have the experience to nurture imaginative thought and not to become an obstacle to the creative tone being set at the beginning of the get-together. Discussion is essential, but the session chief should curtail arguments. When we issue the brainstorming report, there will be time for everyone to examine each point in detail.

We should make some consideration when inviting a person to a brainstorming session. Experienced workers can be important; however, a new college graduate or a quiet scientist can assert new ideas never heard before. We have seen brainstorming with one person all the way up to a thirty person staff. Theoretically, we could hold the session online, and thousands of individuals could participate, but the recorders would be stressed to organize and report any findings. Therefore, we recommend inviting a smaller number to the session. With experience, we learn what works for our organization, but do not be afraid to invite in new idea generators.

For a web design brainstorming session, we should invite a programmer, a graphics artist, a multimedia expert, a subject matter expert for the web content, a delegate representing the target audience, an e-commerce spokesperson, and a Help Desk analyst. Start the conference by explaining that each one of these emissaries should interject ideas in their area of expertise, but we should also encourage them to cross the boundary lines and help the team to innovate a product that we will be happy to show our customer. Once we have confidence in our abilities to manage a brainstorming meeting, we can use two or more experts from each group to give us more ideas.

For our brainstorming example, we will discuss building a website for a Green product. Green products by definition have a reduced effect on human health compared to another like item. A case in point would be a solar powered car would be a healthier choice for humans than using a car powered by electric produced from a coal-burning power plant or from even another car running on gasoline. Our group wants to brainstorm a website that promotes "Green" living. We begin by drawing an ellipse and writing "Green Product" on the inside as shown in figure A.1.
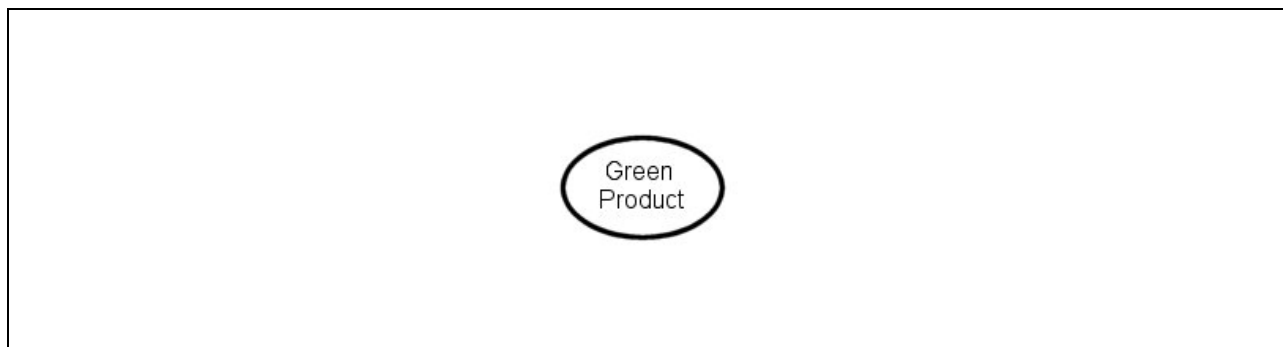

Figure A.1 – Beginning a Green Product Brainstorm Diagram

Create Primary Categories Branching from the Subject
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Once we show and describe the main subject, we need to develop thoughts that will become categories as they branch off the ellipse. Our multimedia expert and target audience rep both agree that we should have videos on the website, so the recorder draws a line and writes "Videos" as shown in figure A.2. The e-commerce agent wants some free promotional videos and desires several that require the person to login and use a password to access. The website user's information will give his department the

needed email and physical mailing address of the client. The recorders add a line projecting off "Videos" for "Free Downloads" and another for "Downloads by User ID and password" as shown in figure A.3.
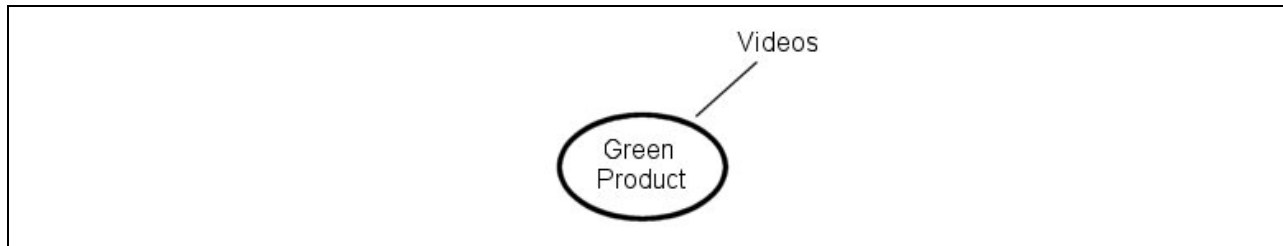

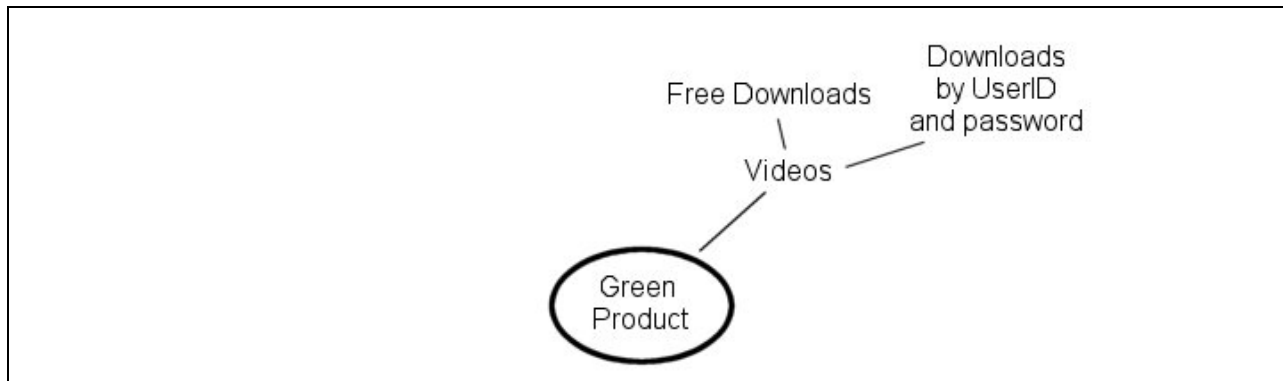Figure A.2 – Creating our First Category Idea to Support the Main Subject

Figure A.3 – Recording Secondary Ideas Connected to the First Branch

The facilitator needs to be careful that one group does not dominate the entire brainstorming gathering and we need to seek the opinions and thoughts from every team member. We ought to be careful not to embarrass a quieter participant or admonish the louder folks for having a good time during the seminar. Many people find that these occasions are a great opportunity to get their points of view across to the leaders of an organization, so they come to the think-tank get-together prepared. By asking for input, we are able to seek the graphic artist's thoughts, and she wants to use a combination of JPG, GIF and Flash movie graphics on the website. We record the suggestion on a branch close to the video limb because they are related.
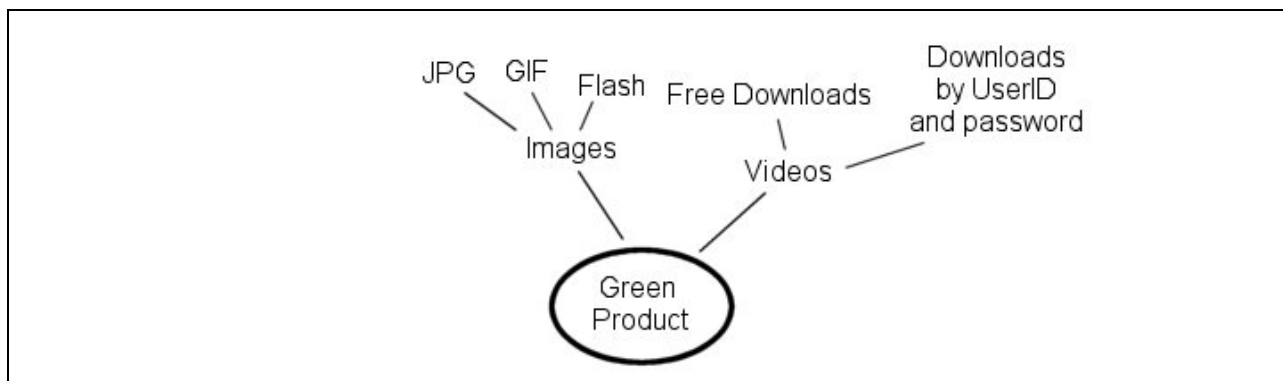

Figure A.4 – Placing Related Ideas Close on the Diagram

The Help Desk Analyst wants the directions to the company's office, the hours of operation, an about us page, and the contact information on multiple pages. He has noticed that not every PDF file or video has a valid copyright from the last project and brings the proposal to the table. The recorder notes the information around the other side of the ellipse to give themselves room for related material. The recorder also attaches a copyright reminder to the "Video" branch.
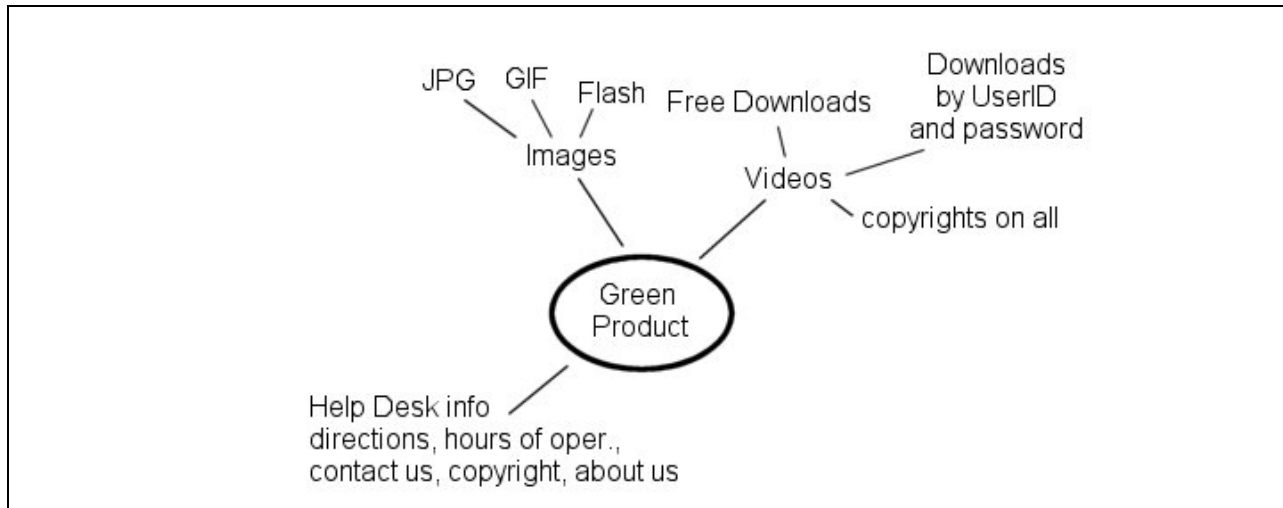

Figure A.5 – Adding Additional Ideas to the Brainstorm Diagram

The target audience rep again interjects that they believe the website should contain live music and downloadable songs. Our programmer knows that a member of her team just learned how to write online games using Java, so he states that he wants to make online and downloadable games where polluters are captured and taken to jail.
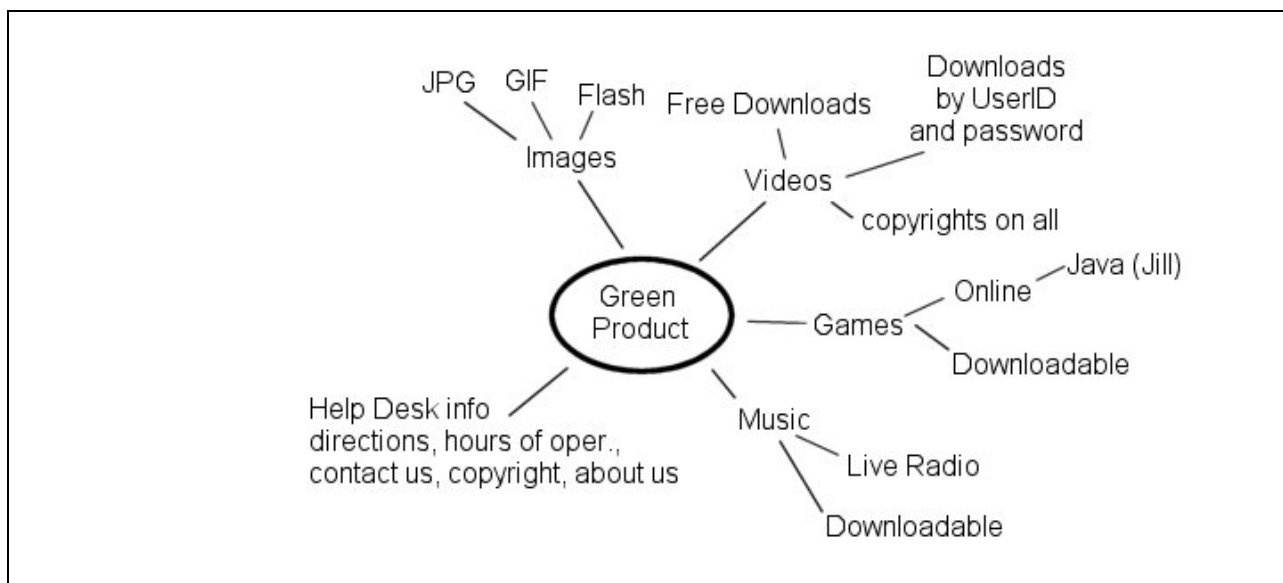

Figure A.6 – Adding Additional Ideas to the Brainstorm Diagram

Even though we write down every idea, not every word is essential, so maybe the

details of what we do with the polluters is not entirely important. We wrote that Jill has the capability to write video games, but we recognize that we might have to run another brainstorming conference just to develop the type of games our audience would like to play. We do not have to make all the decisions in this first session, so concentrate on important ideas and make a note to schedule a video gaming brainstorming conference later.
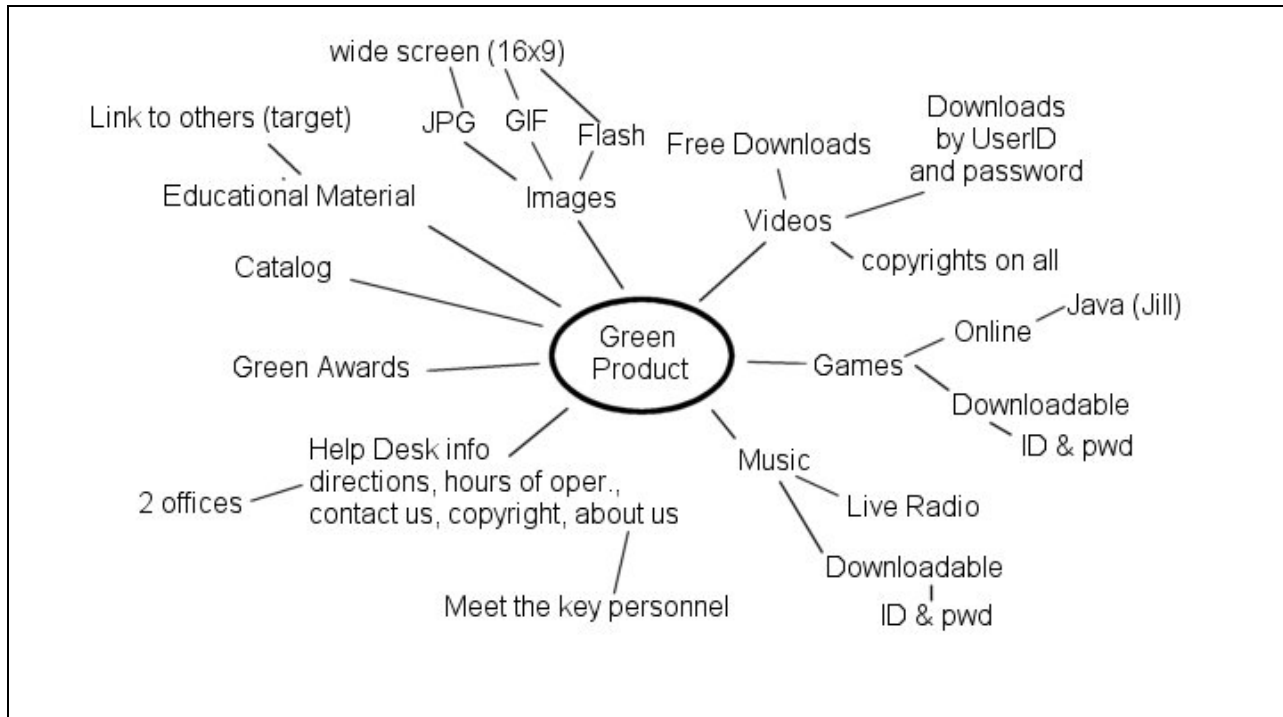

Figure A.7 – A Brainstorming Diagram

When the group has thought of all the primary categories, we want to transition to a new diagram that starts the process all over again. Except, we just concentrate on a single branch. We write "Green Awards" on the middle of a new whiteboard or paper and circle the idea as shown in figure A.8. We now focus on this topic; however, we can still see the initial brainstorming diagram and can walk over to record ideas on the original schematic as needed.
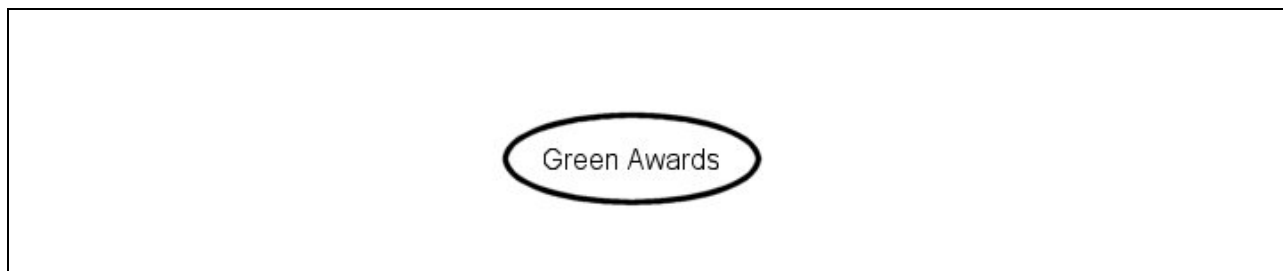

Figure A.8 – A Branch Brainstorming Diagram

Eventually, the team and our leader will expend their creative powers and the conference will begin to lose energy. The team will most likely have a great sense of

achievement, because the diagram will show decisions we have made as well as challenges that we will need to overcome during the near future. The facilitator and recorders will compile the information in a formal report and release the account in a timely manner. The documents will define our proposal for the website. In many cases, groups or in some cases individuals will have the chance to revise the work, so we remove mistakes and the capabilities to do a task are factual.

After the entire process is complete, we can begin to make site maps, storyboards and a website specification. Once these more complete outlines are tailored to the customer's desires through meetings with their agents, we begin to create templates and start to build the new web pages. The probability of producing a winning product increases by following well-disciplined procedures and beginning the process with a brainstorming session.

* World Class CAD Challenge 43-20 * - Create a brainstorming diagram for a website. Produce at least once secondary document expanding on a primary category off the first diagram. Complete this task in less than 60 minutes to maintain your World Class ranking.

Send your best time and a copy of your webpage for verification to the authors of these problems to have your name, location and time posted. See the web site for instructions.

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