



# Seed to CEO

A practical guide for entrepreneurial people and organizations.

Issue Eleven

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## Six Myths of Creativity

What counts for creativity among your company's employees? Is there a certain type of environment that allows ideas to flourish? Or is it the team cohesiveness that makes creativity come naturally?

Teresa Amabile has dealt with such questions for the last 30 years in trying to determine how creative ideas are carried through in business. She is the Head of the Entrepreneurial Management Unit at Harvard Business School. Amabile, along with her research team of PhDs, graduate students, and managers of various companies collected nearly 12,000 daily journal entries from 238 people working on creative projects in seven companies in high-tech, consumer products, and chemical industries.

Amabile structured her survey in an interesting way. She asked participants questions that mainly had to do with their day-to-day work and work environment as they experienced it. She did not tell participants the survey was on workplace creativity.

Amabile and her team are still going through their findings but have been able to narrow the field to six common myths of creativity:

### Myth #1: Creativity Comes from Creative Types

The common answer many managers give when asked, "Where in your organization do you want the most creativity?" is typically in research and development, marketing and advertising, with accounting often listed as the one place they do not want creative types. As a leader, you want everyone to contribute clever ideas, including your financial people.

Creativity depends on a number of things: experience, including knowledge and technical skills; talent; an ability to think in new ways; and the capacity to push through uncreative dry spells. Intrinsic motivation — people who are turned on by their work — is especially critical in fostering creativity.

### Myth #2: Money is a Creativity Motivator

Money isn't everything right? A majority of the survey results indicate that statement to be true. Bonuses and pay-for-performance plans can even be problematic when people believe that every move they make is going to affect their compensation. In those situations, people tend to get risk averse. Of course, people need to feel that they're being compensated fairly. But generally most employees put more value on a work environment where creativity is supported, valued, and recognized. It's no question that people become more motivated when they care about their work and when using their relevant skills to carry out the task. That's why leaders must do their best to ensure projects are given to those whose skills and interests match the task assigned. People tend to get frustrated with tasks that are above their skill level and become bored when tasks are below their skill level.

### Myth #3: Time Pressure Fuels Creativity

During the study, most people thought they were more creative when they were working under a pressure deadline.

*"It is common sense to take a method and try it. If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something."*

— Franklin D. Roosevelt

Seed-to-CEO  
Published by



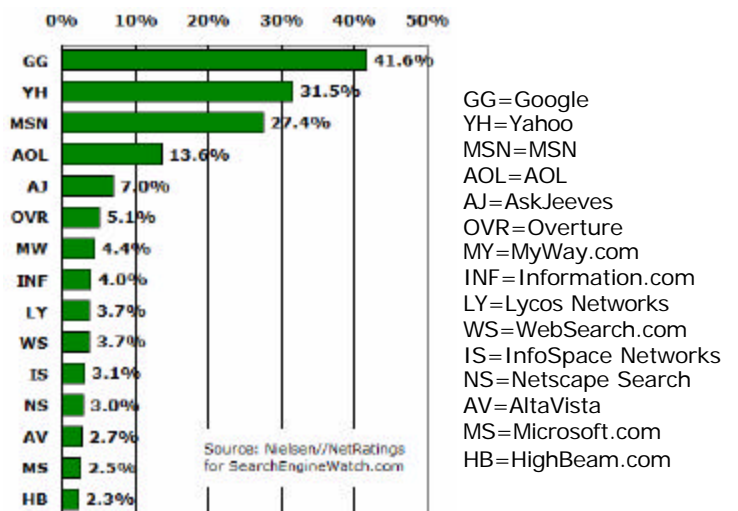
## Not All Internet Search Engines are Created Equal

Information has never been as easy to access as it is today. Internet search engines and directories are perhaps the primary reason for this positive change. There are many to choose from, but be aware that search engines and directories use different techniques to index, search, and display results.

First, some statistics: According to Nielson, the top search destinations are as indicated in the chart below.

### Top 15 Search Destinations

Home & Work Users, June 2004



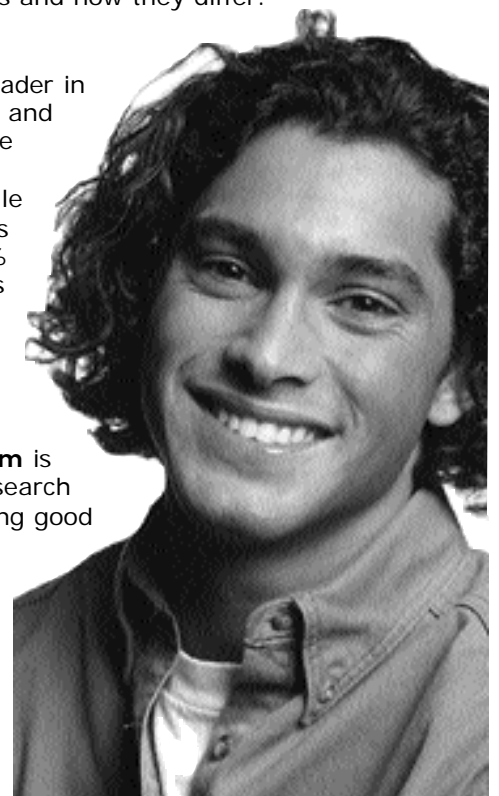
Bear in mind that popularity doesn't necessarily mean good results for your specific search. When seeking information, consider using multiple search engines and directories. Here is an overview of some of the more popular destinations and how they differ:

### www.Google.com

The clear market leader in terms of popularity and thoroughness. Some measurements estimate that Google is responsible for as many as up to 80% of all search results because several leading search engines use Google's data.

**www.Vivisimo.com** is an up and coming search engine that is getting good reviews because it "clusters results."

Try it and see the links on the left side.



Continued . . .

Continued . . .

But the actual study results showed the opposite to be true. People were the least creative when trying to 'beat the clock.' Productivity not only went down during the day a certain task was due — but also the following two days as well. Time pressure doesn't allow for creativity to take place. Ideas need an incubation period where people have a chance to engage with a problem. And, it's not so much the deadline that people have trouble with, it's the distractions. People can be creative when they're under pressure, but only when they are able to focus on the work. Tasks tend to be easier to complete when everyone knows what has to be done and when.

**Myth #4: Fear Forces Breakthroughs**

There is widespread belief that fear and sadness somehow encourage creativity. These notions were not evident in the survey results. Creativity was positively associated with joy and love, and negatively associated with fear, anger, and anxiety. The findings show that people are happiest when they come up with a creative idea and more likely to have a "breakthrough" idea if they were happy the day before.

**Myth #5: Competition Beats Collaboration**

There is another common belief that internal competition fuels and fosters innovation. The survey findings, however, show that creativity is compromised when people in a group compete instead of collaborate. The most creative teams were those who were able to share and debate ideas. When people feel the need to compete for recognition, information is withheld rather than shared.

**Myth #6: A Streamlined Organization is a Creative Organization**

The survey findings also show that creativity is difficult to foster in an organization undergoing downsizing. Anticipation of the event and fear of the unknown negatively impacts creativity as people disengage from their work. In fact, some results show that months after a downsizing, creativity can still be down significantly.

In conclusion, creativity flourishes — in good times and bad — when people do work that they love, are allowed to deeply engage in their tasks, and collaborate within an environment where creativity is valued and recognized.

Source: *Fast Company Magazine*



**www.About.com** is great when you want to focus on a single topic as it offers the greatest depth and breadth due to the 480 subjects managed by 480 expert editors (i.e., highly qualified humans).

**www.Dogpile.com** searches multiple search engines simultaneously and also clusters results.

**www.Kartoo.com** is very different than all the others in that it displays your results in a visual "mindmap" with rollovers. You have to try it to see.

**www.Yahoo.com** — another old favourite. ✕

**Most Common Website Design Problems**

The fact is that most websites are poorly designed. A simple browse through the Internet will demonstrate this unfortunate reality. Even websites of many well-known and established companies fall short. One should never underestimate the impact a poorly designed website will have on how an organization is perceived.

The good news is that you do not have to be a technical or design guru to assess the good, the bad, and the ugly — and to understand why.

Simply pick a website, use the attached checklist and 15 minutes of your time!

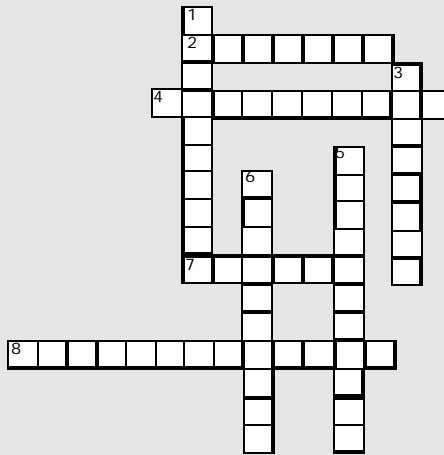
Here are some of the most common problems:

- Poor navigational graphics.
- Disorganized content.
- Information overload.
- Old content.
- Poor quality graphics and photos.
- Graphics which are not representative of the business.
- Inconsistent design with other marketing materials.
- Contact information that is hard to find.
- S-L-O-W download speeds.
- Improper sizing.
- Unnecessary use of third party technologies such as Flash and Shockwave.
- Improper use of Adobe Acrobat PDF files.
- Typos and broken links.
- Bad grammar.
- Lack of strategy.

✕

**Test your knowledge of the information contained in this issue of Seed-to-CEO!**

Answers Below



**ACROSS**

- 2 A method of grouping search engine results \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 A business event that affects creativity \_\_\_\_\_
- 7 The market leader in search engines \_\_\_\_\_
- 8 Never \_\_\_\_\_ the impact of a poorly designed website

**DOWN**

- 1 This business function is typically not thought of as a place where creativity is desired \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 When considering company sponsorship make sure your contribution will be used as \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 A common myth associated with creativity \_\_\_\_\_
- 6 Many people favor a work environment where creativity is supported, valued, and \_\_\_\_\_

**Ask MediaSpark ...**

*What should I review when considering a donation or sponsorship?*

*Have a business or technology question? Email us!*

A donation or sponsorship not only shows that you are a good corporate citizen but it can also be another form of advertising and promotion. First, you should make sure that your contribution will be put to good use as intended. Second, try to assure that it will be helpful to you when possible (What some people like to term "enlightened self-interest."). Consider the following:

- History of the organization.
- People being served (community or specific groups).
- Type of event.
- Quality and professionalism of event organization.
- Consider donating a product or service rather than cash, as you often have better control over non-cash donations. In addition, a product donation can often return long term goodwill and word-of-mouth benefit as the product continues to be used well after the event. If you do decide to donate cash, be sure to stipulate how you expect it to be used.
- Request sponsorship recognition before, during, and after the event.
- Receive a tax receipt for your donation even if it is a product or a service.
- Decline politely if you cannot participate. ✕

ACROSS: 2 CLUSTER | 4 DOWNLOADING | 7 GOOGLE | 8 UNDERESTIMATE  
DOWN: 1 ACCOUNTING | 3 INTENDED | 5 COMPETITION | 6 RECOGNIZED

**About Seed-to-CEO**

**Contact us to ...**

**RECEIVE** this newsletter by email.

**ADD A FRIEND** to our mailing list.

**BE REMOVED** from future mailings.

**DISCUSS** your software development, eLearning, website, and print design needs.

**MediaSpark** helps people and organizations achieve success through the effective use of **design** and **technology**. We offer products and services to meet the needs of businesses, schools, non profits, government, community organizations, and individuals in North America and around the world.

**Seed-to-CEO** is written and published eight times a year by **MediaSpark Inc.**, an award-winning technology and design company.

Over the years we have helped many organizations achieve business success by providing assistance and guidance on a number of technology, education, and marketing related initiatives. The objective of this newsletter is to extend our experience to a wider community in hopes of helping our clients, associates, friends, and prospective customers to become more successful—and to save them time, money, and stress while doing so!

We welcome your comments. Please contact us to explore how we may assist you on your road to success.

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# Most Common Website Design Problems

*Become an informed website critic in 15 minutes or less!*

Most websites are poorly designed. A simple browse through the World Wide Web will demonstrate this unfortunate reality. Even websites of many well-known and established companies fall short. One should never underestimate the impact a poorly designed website will have on how an organization is perceived. But you don't have to be a technical or design guru to assess the good, the bad, and the ugly – and understand why. Simply pick a website, use this checklist and 15 minutes of your time!

PROBLEM	USER EXPERIENCE Website: _____ URL: _____	Good	Bad	Ugly
<b>Poor navigational graphics</b>	Do the main menu choices keep changing, moving or disappearing? Or is the menu comprised of graphics but no text, leaving you unsure of where to go or how to get there? Main menu choices should be clear and visible at all times. It should be easy to know where you are going and how to get there.			
<b>Disorganized content</b>	Customers don't have much patience to spend time searching through a site. Could a first time visitor find key information <i>quickly and easily</i> ?			
<b>Information Overload</b>	Does the websites display so much information, flashing lights, and animations at you that you think you have arrived at a media circus?			
<b>Old Content</b>	Old product info, old news releases, old news ... Old content means old results. Does the site content encourage customers to visit or return? Is the website an accurate representation of the business?			
<b>Poor quality graphics and photos.</b>	Are the graphics clear and sharp, not grainy or jagged? Are they well cropped, and focus on the key subject? Or do they look like a personal home photo album scattered on the screen?			
<b>Graphics which are not representative of the business.</b>	Do all graphical elements on the website represent the organization and its business? Will the customer be able to relate to the company and its products?			
<b>Inconsistent design with other marketing materials.</b>	Does reading a brochure and then visiting the website leave you wondering if you have reached the same company? Is that oh-so-important corporate identity professionally conveyed consistently across both print and digital media?			
<b>Contact information that is hard to find</b>	Does the website allow 2-way communication with customers? If the customer cannot easily provide feedback and ask questions, will they wonder if they are dealing with a legitimate business?			
<b>S-L-O-W download speeds.</b>	Did the website designers forget that some of us (in fact most of us) only have slow dialup connections? Did they overlook the fact that customers will not wait several minutes every time they click the mouse?			
<b>Improper Sizing</b>	Does the website look far too small or far too big? Does it contain text that is oversized, lengthy paragraphs of text, or long wide lines you have to read by fiddling with horizontal scroll bars? Did the designers use large monitors set at high resolutions when they designed the website, forgetting that not everyone has the same screen resolution? Does the website display properly at high and low resolution settings? Does the website display properly when not being viewed full screen?			
<b>Unnecessary use of third party technologies such as Flash and Shockwave.</b>	Does the website require visitors to download a special plugin, such as Flash, Shockwave, etc.? If so does this media element add anything of value to the website? (Many users won't wait to have a plugin installed. And worse, if they go through the trouble of doing so, and then the media element does not add any value, they won't be pleased. There are a number of useful and compelling technologies available to enhance a website but they should only be used if they add something of significant value.)			
<b>Improper use of Adobe Acrobat PDF files.</b>	Have PDF formatted documents only been used when necessary? Have you ever wanted to review some information quickly, but were informed that you needed to download the Acrobat PDF file? And then after waiting several minutes for it to open, discover that it only contained a page of text? (PDF offers significant benefits but it is the perfect option only in certain instances.)			
<b>Typos and Broken Links</b>	Did you find typographical errors or broken links throughout the website? on the home page? in prominent headers? How many errors do you think your customers will overlook?			
<b>Bad Grammar</b>	Did you find text which was poorly written? (It doesn't take a Phd in English to spot poor grammar!) Is that how you would like your company represented?			
<b>Lack of Strategy</b>	What is the purpose of the website? To inform, educate, promote, sell, or entertain? Whatever the objective, is the content structured to focus on the key objective?			