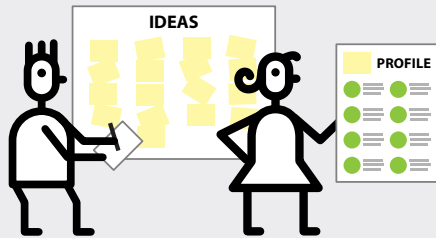# Innovation filter:
From scattered to focused

1 Develop your ideas

To filter ideas, first you have to understand each one individually. To do this, flesh out the idea and build a basic business case.

Because you want to compare the ideas, you have to do this in a structured way. If you've already captured all of this content during the ideation phase—great. But otherwise, create a worksheet, a spreadsheet or other content capture tool to gather the following information:

Audience or buyer
Who does it help?

Market position
Are we first or catching up to competitors?

Capabilities needed
What people, processes, and tools will we need to deliver this idea?

Approach
Will we build, buy, or partner to create those capabilities?

Impact
What is the financial impact of this idea?

Value
Why are we doing this? What benefit will it have?

Risk
What could go wrong? What happens if we don't do this?

Effort
What's the time, cost, and disruption to the organization?

Content should be as brief as possible—think check boxes, dollar ranges, and bullet points—not paragraphs.

2 Sort your ideas

Once you've documented your ideas in a systematic way, you're ready to sort, rank, and prioritize them.

First, explore organizing principles and framework. For instance, you can arrange all of the ideas by effort, audience, or ROI.

Or you can cluster them into risk levels, build/buy/partner grouping, or capabilities needed. Consider developing a heat map that shows the strengths and weaknesses of each idea.

This begins to get really interesting when you juxtapose multiple factors. The classic example is cost versus impact—what will give you the biggest "bang for your buck." But what about value compared to audience, or market position compared to risk?
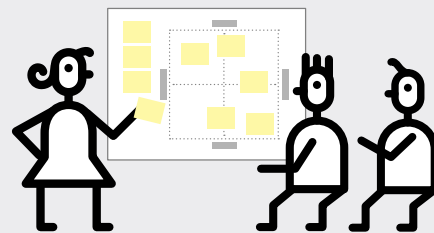

Play around with different sorting structures and frameworks to answer different questions. Don't forget to refer back to the goals you set for the effort. The sorting method you go with should provide relevant insight.

3 Make decisions

After you've sorted your ideas—once or more—its time to decide which ones to move forward with. Take all of the ideas and have your team vote or rank them.
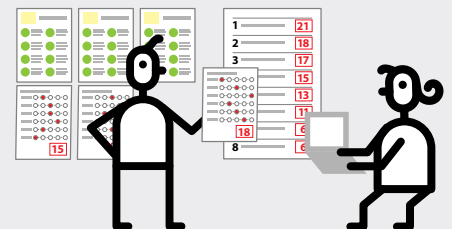
The ranking could be as simple as identifying your top 3 and seeing what is common across many lists.
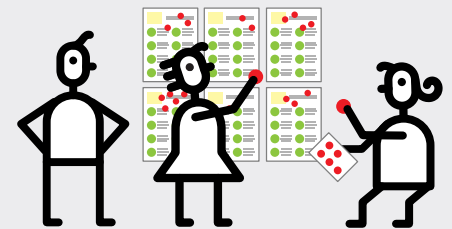
Or you could give teams a certain number of points to "spend" towards each idea and see which idea accumulates the most.
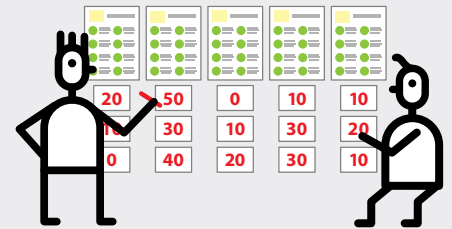
Or you can assign a rank or score in each sorting framework and then create an aggregate score across all.

The key is to create an environment where people feel comfortable expressing their opinion and trusting the wisdom of the group.

If you want to learn more about filtering ideas, get in touch at www.thoughtform.com or 412.488.8600.

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