



Suggesting to people that they should find inspiration to help them in their work is a little like telling them that they should drink more water to keep themselves hydrated. You hear it much more often than you do it. While some folks can habitualize an hourly trip to the water cooler, the rest of us find it hard to find time (and even harder to switch from the brown hot stuff).

So when it comes to inspiration, we all know we need fresh input – but finding that input is even harder than finding the water cooler. I’ve found, though, the best way to overcome the difficulty is to chuck the map and be random.

We need to be random, we need to seek random and we need to make random eclectic.

When I suggest that we should be random what I’m saying is that we need to find inspiration from all sorts of places, and not just our regular small set of influences. We need to be curious. We need to stop looking within our own industries to see where the next idea might come from. The idea might come from another industry, sure, but these days it may just as easily come from a consumer who just wants to do something differently.

For my trendspotting company, **PSFK.com**, we scan a large range of categories looking for ideas. As someone who turns ideas into beverages, you should, too. Be curious. You might be working in the beverage sector but you should watch what’s happening in art, music, electronics, retail, telecom and especially health and beauty. It’s only by looking over many categories that you can take a global view of the macro trends running through culture and business.

The whole world is a moving target. Popular culture by definition changes constantly. Are you keeping up?

So how do you seek random? Start by visiting the world of ideas through the Web, where, every day, people publish very useful information that can help you. A daily task should be to read what they have to say.

I know that visiting one site after another can take a lot of time. Fortunately, nearly every worthwhile web site provides a news feed of its content. You get these news feeds through an RSS Reader, which monitors the web sites that are churning out ideas each day. RSS Readers are programs that sit on your com-

puter’s desktop like electronic mail and pick these feeds up, presenting the headlines and an extract of each article of your favorite web sites as soon as they publish new content.

With an RSS Reader, you no longer have to jump from site to site to see what’s going on in the world: randomness comes to you. So get an RSS Reader like NetNewsWire or Bloglines and monitor about 50 sites. If your company prohibits downloads, use MyYahoo or MyGoogle as your RSS reader.

But which of these sites should you check out? Here are three types to begin with: Cool Hunters, Trend Spotters and Marketing Pundits. These sites churn news and opinion about what’s inspirational daily.

Classic Cool Hunter sites are **Coolhunting.com**, **JoshSpear.com**, **NotCot.org** and **DailyCandy.com**. As Cool Hunters, they make it a point to pick up on hot products and services before anyone else. The problem with them is that they’re often biased towards aesthetics and they prize novelty more often than true innovation. To get a more rounded view of what’s considered ‘cool,’ check out other sites like the **Ze Frank video podcast** or photo sites like the **Sartorialist** and **Facehunter**, where the authors roam the streets taking photos of interesting people. You are also likely to find great regional Cool Hunter blogs and newsletters which might help you in a specific geography (e.g. **UrbanJunkies.co** is great for London).

Then there are Trend Spotter sites. I humbly submit that PSFK.com and its sister sites are classics, as are **Trendwatching** and **Springwise**. These sites take more of a business perspective on trends. Sure, you can find cool products here, but there’s also some thought about consumer and business trends, as well. Other sites to watch are **Creative Post** and **TrendHunter.com**. Be careful though, as the content on these sites have been subjectively chosen by the editors. Also, learn to spot the differences between manifestations of trends and trends themselves.

You also need to find great Marketing Pundit blogs. These consist of someone in marketing exploring new ideas, like Seth Godin or Malcolm Gladwell. You may also find someone writing about specific industries too. Some great thinkers to watch out for are Grant

McCracken and his **This Blog Sits At** site, John Grant and his **Brand Tarot** site, Russell Davies’ site and **Influx Insights** from the ad agency BSSP.

What about old media? Don’t they have anything to say? They do, but you can hear it online, by picking up the RSS feeds of a number of newspapers. Avoid the business sections and choose sections that might be outside your field like Arts & Culture or Travel to get new ideas. There are also sites like **Marktd.com**, **Digg** and **Netscape** where users vote on their favorite headlines. You can choose the RSS feed of the top stories or by a certain category.

One way to get truly random is to subscribe to RSS feeds at certain sites where content can be diced by keyword (or tag). Why not consider what your company’s brand values are and see what people think about those values? If one of your brand values was “Honesty,” put that word into the search engine of sites like the communal photo-site **Flickr** or the popular video-site **YouTube**. Because users tag their images and videos with keywords, the results that come back will show you people’s visual interpretations of your brand values in photos and moving images. Amazing stuff. Both of these sites allow you to take RSS feed from these results pages, so every time someone puts a photo up and tags “Honesty,” or, say, “Effervescent,” it will appear in your RSS Reader.

Getting fed by this new flood of random ideas is terrific, but you need to take one more step to make random electric: you have to write about these ideas. Just like you used to do your homework each evening that repeated the lessons learned that day at school, it’s important to write about what you see. By writing about ideas and trends, they are processed and percolated better through your mind. It allows you to connect ideas and see bigger themes which you will not be able to see by just digesting the data. And as they percolate, you start to see what will apply to your particular situation.

And also, by writing the ideas down, you can share those ideas, create discussion with your colleagues, and get them thinking, too. Who knows, together you might drink enough water from the ideas pool to develop the next great idea for your company. ★

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